

LIVE





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"Absolutely incredible to look at, packed with scintillating effects." - 🖦 both graphics and gameplay." - 1814 "Prey looks like one of the best first-person shooters of the year in

"Doom 3" hiked the bar. Prey may transform the bar altogether." - 100







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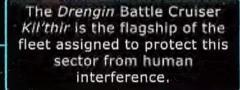
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CONTENTS

AUGUST 2006 ISSUE #265



12 Editorial

Our editor-in-chief is having a total geek spaz-out over the new Sam and Max game, It's a bit sad.

14 Letters

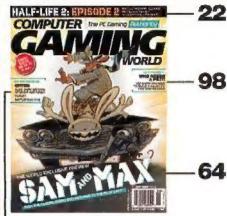
We love our readers. Especially the ones who are furries.











COVER STORY

SAM & MAX

Sweet jumping jackrabbits! It's the long-overdue return of everyone's favorite canine shamus and hyperkinetic rabbity thing...and CGW's got exclusive intel on their first case!

18 Radar

Valve Software gives us a peek behind the curtain at the next episode of Half-Life 2 and funnyman designer Tim Schafer talks humor in games. Plus, senior editor Darren Gladstone tells us what the missus thinks about his "job."

58 Overrated/ Underrated

From overhyped technology to underrated RPG classes, we take gaming's overinflated egos down a peg and put the underdogs up on pedestals.

75 Viewpoint

Find out why Rise of Legends is one of our favorite RTS games in a long while—plus, get the full dirt on Half-Life 2: Episode One, SIN Episodes: Emergence, Guild Wars Factions, Heroes of Might and Magic V, and more.

- 76 Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends
- 79 Hitman: Blood Money
- 80 Half-Life 2: Episode One
- 81 SIN Episodes; Emergence
- 82 Rogue Trooper
- 84 Heroes of Might and Magic V
- 85 Final Fantasy XI: Treasures of Aht Urhgan
- 86 Guild Wars Factions
- 88 Auto Assault
- 90 Paradise
- 92 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
- 94 Tom vs. Bruce: Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends

COMPUTER GALVING



98 Tech

Why waste \$600 on a PlayStation 3 when you can get a game-worthy rig for the same amount? Check out this month's Tech section to see how you can build your own budget box.

106 Greenspeak

Congratulations on your purchase of Age of Rising Legends II: The Sword of Xanthorl









Falls NDS

- 91 Alien Stars
- 46 Alone in the Dark
- 38 Auto Assault
- 52 Battlefield 2142
- 18 Crysi
- 36 Dark Messiah of Might and Magic
- 42 Elveon
- 85 Final Fantasy XI: Treasures of Aht Urtigan
- 92 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
- 86 Guild Wars Factions
- 80 Half-Life 2: Episode One
- 22 Half-Life 2: Episode Two
- 64 Heroes of Might and Magic V
- 79 Hitman: Blood Money
 - 16 Just Cause
- 90 Paradise
- 76 Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends
- 82 Rogue Trooper
- 64 Sam & Max
- 81 SiN Episodes: Emergence
- 27 Vanguard, Saga of Horoes



THIS MONTH ON JUP.COM



CGW.1UP.COM

Can't get enough Sem & Max? Hit 1UP for an exclusive video tour of Sam & Max developer Telltale Games' studiol

GROGNARDS.1UP.COM

Attention wer-gaming nuts: Check out collumnist Bruce Geryk's blog for even more hardcore ponderings on this undersopreciated genre.

CGWRADIO, 1UP.COM

Why read what the CGW editors have to say when you can listen to their geeky, whiny voices instead? Join the fun and find out why all the girls are going wild.

F LAGOMORPHS ND CANINES

Yay! They're back!



IN THIS MIXED-UP, MUDDLED-UP, SHOOK-UP WORLD of ours-with soaring gasoline prices, scary global . conflicts, and the inexplicable box-office success of Garlield: A Tale of Two Kittles-it just seems like wer never get any good news anymore.

But if you flip back to the cover of this magazine, I think. you'll agree that we can—for a moment; at least—lay down our angst and weltschmerz, and give out one big, fat, hearty "YAY!!!" Yes, Sam and Max, everyone's favorite: furry private investigators, return to the PC at long last,... and you can read all about it here in these very pages:

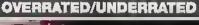
If you don't know who Sam and Max are, you're in for a treat, as Steve Purcell's cartoon dog and "hyperkinetic rabbity thing" or, um, "lagomorph," as Max pre-fers to be called, are two of the great comic book characters of the 1980s—and also starred in one of the best adventure games ever made—LucasArts! brilliant -Sam & Max Hit the Road, way back in 1993.

In the 13 years since that game, more than one attempt was made to revive the: series, but nothing ever came of it. Now, finally, it's happening...with Steve Purcell himself on board, along with the good people at developer Telitale Games. (many of whom are LucasArts vets). Mr. Purceil and company were infinitely. gracious with their time and energy on this story, so here's a public shout-out to them. And thanks for the cover drawing, too, Steve!

Can you tell I'm excited? Sue me. After playing roughly 100 humorless. and boring Myst clones for over 10 years now, I have the right to be excited when a classic comic franchise. returns. And you do, too. -

/JEFF GREEN HOITOR-IN-CHIEF

New Playing: Prey, Rise of Legends; 1URcom Blog: cgwjeff.1UR.com





SEAN MOLLOY MANAGINE EDITOR Overmied: My ability to debate Klarkegazni's The Concept of Annies with strangers on the laws. Underrated: Talent for turning insects Scientific names into posic anagrams.
Now Playing: Place of Legends, World of WarCraft lots of DS games.
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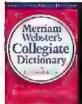




RYAN SCOTT

Overrated: My unliappable calminess, Undertaind: Angry Ryan (Jalif's rese-tion to this picture: "You lack like you stapped out at Reservoir Dogs."

New Playing: *Rice of Legends* 1URcom Riog: pgw-ryen.1URcom



SHAWN ELLIOTT = Overrated: Underrated, Underrated, How Playing: Half-Life 2: Episode One. Pray, Baktiefield 2: Armonad Fury 10Record Blog: eginshawn,10Record



LOGAN PARR Overeited: People think I'm a neat freek. It only they could see my deak at work.... Underrated: My alget vision. It's just comething all of us Kiwis have. Now Playing: With the new cat who recently joined the househeld.

1URcom Biog: logans_run.1URcom





SEAN DALLASKIDD ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

Overrated: Gravity. Underrated: 8-A-N-A-N-A-S

Now Playing: Burnout Revenue 10Room Blog: the_dallaskidd.10Room

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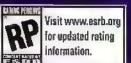
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LETTER OF THE MONTH



Hey, CGWI Just wanted to put in my two cents about the recent announcement of Bizzard's motion picture based on the WarCraft universe, My reaction actually occurred in stages, as follows:

First w00t! Been waiting for this since I first heard rumors of it years ago! Badass, man! But then doubt enters my mind: A WarCraft movie? After all these videogame-to-film flops? Then some renewed belief: But if anyone can do it, Blizzard can! I'm back on top of the world

The final feeing, which continues to concern me, however, is the fact that it will be a live-action firm Whaa? Blizzard has made such beautiful ingame movies over the years with CGI; why would they switch now? I know this will get me some flak, but I was not a fan of the LOTR movies, primarily because of all the big-guy-in-a-rubbersuit-that's-supposed-to-be-an-ord nonsense. So, while I delight in the idea of a WarCraft movie, I question Blizzard's rationale behind deciding to make it live-action rather than computer-done as in the past. I quote your own magazine, re: WC3: "[N]o one with eyes and a brain can argue with the virtues of the game's absolutely incredible cut-scenes, which feature some of the best CG animation ever. Someday, Bl zzard should just go for it and make the movie it's obviously dying to make," So ask yourself, "Is It?"

Steve

Sure, a live-action WarCraft movie sounds a little scary, but just imagine some of the casting possibilities! Natalle Portman as a night eff! Jack Black as an orc! Joan Rivers as a troll! The possibilities are endless!

EAD EDUCATION

As much as I love reading your material, I think your magazine has caused me far too much trouble at school to justify paying some odd sum per month. It all started with your June 2006 issue, I was reading your article about keyboards and mice ("Play with Me") [CGW #263] while skipping class and listening to a CD player. It felt like somebody was watching me, so I turned and



discovered the creature to be a teacher Interrogation soon followed, and she went to the nearest classroom I thought I was being busted for the CD player, but not It was your stupic magazine. She thought I was looking at

pornographic material, Consider you and your dirty article names fired

(Note: Please pardon my sarcasm, Without your magazine, there wouldn't be stories like this to tell.)

Nic

We publish a series of controversial articles on sex in games, and your teacher busts you for an article on...keyboards? Someone really must do something about the state of public education in this country.

WE PREFER SEX. TOO!

I was appalled to read Chad Engler's letter in the July 2006 issue [CGW #264] decrying sex in favor of "violence, drugs, and alcohol." I would much rather hear about sex than death or pain. I know it's hard to remember sametimes, but violence is usually ILLEGAL in the real world. And sex is part of most people's lives (or at least they WANT it to be). Doesn't if seem a little unhealthy to have a society that believes violence is more acceptable than sex?

EARTH

SPORE PREQUEL?

I loved at the propaganda about Spore [CGW #263, June 2006] and arm now awaiting my chance to evolve! But no mention of SimEarth, Will Wright's earlier effort to play planetary god? Anything you can tell those of its who remember that one?

Jon Elliott

Why don't you tell us, since you're so smart?! But, yeah, you're right, SimEarth was an earlier attempt (1990) at a somewhat similar theme, but it was rather wonky and complex. Spore should be much more user friendly.

OH, SURE-NOW YOU CORRECT US!

Well, after reading CGW #255 [October 2005] again (yes, in the ballmoom) I noticed that you messed up on page 30 in your F.E.A.R article. Look at the pictures on the left. I think you

mixed up the captions on the pictures. Either this magazine is a giant quiz to us geeks on how to look closely at things, or you just messed up. Either way: HA HA HA HA HA HA HA LOLZ NOOBZORS I PWN U. I win

Fish

Dude, you're reading an article from last October. Wo've been making mistakes for 10 issues since then. Please get with the program and criticize our newer errors. Thank you.

A NEWER ERROR

So, great magazine, had it for a long time, but recently I noticed a little blurb in one of your Rumor Mill bubbles [June 2006], which stated: "Are all things radioactive destined for delay? [The fact that! Fallout 2, S.T.A.L.K.E.R and Duke Nukem Forever are all supposedly still happening, say so." Is that right? Fallout 2, sh? Fallout 2 from 1998? Surely you couldn't be referring to Fallout 3? No, I wouldn't think so, because such a reference in your magazine without telling more would raise the tortured spirits of postapocalyptic gamers from their harshly lit crypts to smite such a blasphemer, much like doomsayers on June 6th. A mistake, yes—but more so: a devious deception. I salute you!

Fallout Fanatic #45219

And we salute you back! And so does our Copy Desk, which had to edit your letter! So, see, we all make mistakes! Yay!



FURRY CORNER

Your response in your podcast to that one listener's question about whether or not you goys are furries was completely unnecessary. You are following the typical stereotypes about how furries are perverts and how they find animals

sexy. If you read the fink that I so thoughtfully supplied to you, you will find out that a very small percentage of furries actually support the adult themes. I am sure that I am not the only one offended by your ridiculous answer. Next time, do a little research before commenting on a topic that you do not at all understand (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Furry_fandom).

Schwimmwagen21

Actually, we all kind of did have a thing for Jessica Rabbit, now that we think about it.

SPEAKUP

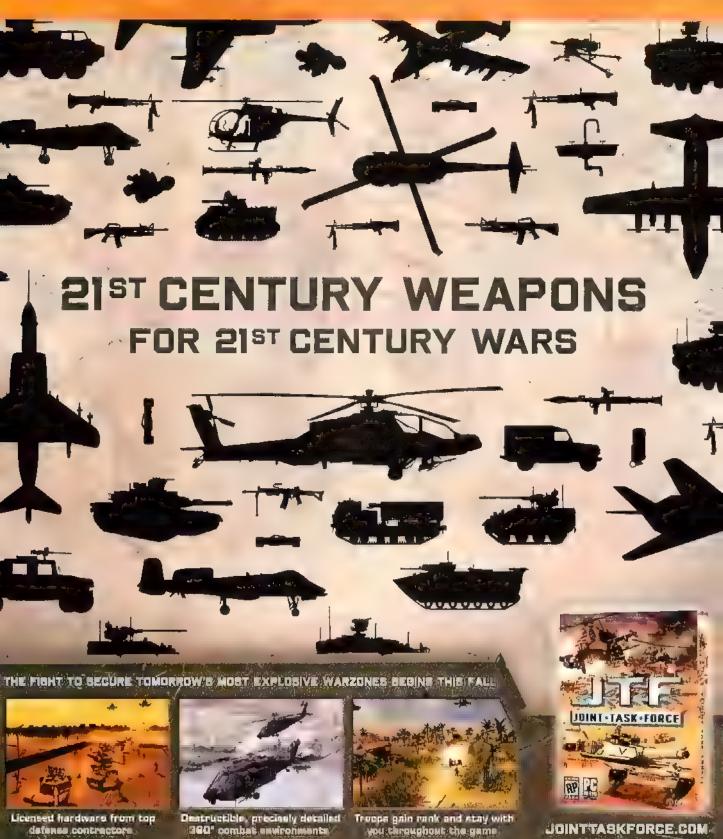
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Hi. As a treat from last read from last read in not complete in not complete in no about doing away with the ratings. I don't really care.

James

I love games, but to say they're art is just, weird. I doubt I would ever see The Sims 2 or F.E.A.R. playing next to the Mona Lisa —Adam Ruhoff Those whining about no scores should put lown the porn while on the pot and read something educational, like a game review.

—Daye



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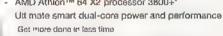




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FROM FAR CRY TO CRY515 Five lessons Crytek learned



INTERVIEW The Full Throttle and Grine Fandango funnyman gets serious



Malung the futuristic Battlefield follow-up

PREVIEW





"Far Cry looked great, but was a bit stylized," says designer Covat Yerli. "For Crysis, we wanted to push as far toward photorealism—or what we call 'videorealism'

ica wants some. North Korea wants some. The zero-grav whatsits onboard want some.

"This time, we really wanted to ramp up the scale of the story," he says, "And although Crysis, too, is about one man ultimately saving the world, it carries a sizable supporting cast as well as story line and objective structures that definitely change depending on game events. For instance, if an ally dies, the story accounts for it. If you don't successfully defend against an alien attack, the game doesn't end-it adapts and alters your objectives. Crysis' dynamic story line does away with traditional A-to-B design. Death is the one and only losing condition."

Crysis eyebalts open-path play in opposition to Half-Life 2's hands-inside-the-car conservatism. Where rail rides say "suss out this context's ready-made purpose" (dynamite that door, splinter that support beam), Crysis nudges players to create context from natural contingency. It's the difference between baddies bunching up around flammable drums and soldiers scooting into defense formation when a silenced shot kindles the topped-off jerry can attached to their jeep (Crysis' hero Jake Dunn's que to slink into the gully he glommed earlier. to pass the patrol, or to pursue any number of other options Yerli says his game offers second by second, hour by hour).

"With Far Cry," he says, "we wanted to ensure that the human-versus-human combat was firstrate and felt realistic. When translated to combat against the (mutant) togens, though, tactical realism suffered, and gameplay went from the unique expenence of outsmarting an enemy to

more standard run-and-gunning where the gamer simply out-reacts the enemy. We've significantly Improved A.I. in Crysis. Adversaries are aware of their surroundings and actually use objects in the environment in natural ways. And, as with fleshand-blood enemies, the aften invaders are coordinated, free-thinking, and brutally intelligent, and create a truly systemic play experience where the opposition reacts to and counters your actions."

MULTIPLAYER

"We have great expectations and are ensuring the multiplayer game gets attention," Yerlı says. "Real-time player customization (via equipment modding and on-the-fly nanotechsuit manipulation) makes the traditional suite of modes more tactical than you're used to-plus, we've created a unique mode that we believe has the potential to build a significant online community." Yerli's mum on details, but he leads us to suspect something a little like multiplayer Half-Life mod Science and Industry, where famillarity with specific equipment improves efficiency and nabbing "artifacts" amps your war machine's muscle, allowing access to more and new weapons and vehicles. Furthermore, Crytek insists It's offering full support via a robust and user-friendly matchmaking system with leaderboards, clans, ladders, leagues—the whole shooter shebang.

VARIETY

"Far Cry was just jungle. It worked, but Crysis' environment is never the same once tine terraforming starts," says Yerli, revealing the Invaders' immediate rhyme and reason. "Imagine the jungle flash frozen-it mixes up interaction in ways that we'll reveal over the coming months.

EXCLUSIVE PR

As Crytek founder and designer Cevat Yerli has it, "Far Cry was Island of Dr. Moreauinspired, and about a one-man army on a mission." With sci-fi shooter Crysis, Yerli's team drives toward dramatic tones, characters we can care about, and Oscar-worthy comphnotions still hard to swallow in a genre that emotes with zam-pow. And plotwise, this is balls-out, Tinseltown fare. In case you've been sleeping: Zipping through space at asteroid speed, a UFO crashes in the South China Sea and supercoots ground zero, crystallizing air and icing leaves like tropical chandeliers. Amer-



"CRYSIS" ENVIRONMENT IS NEVER THE SAME ONCE THE TERRAFORMING STARTS.

-CEVAT YERLI, FOUNDER AND DESIGNER









Mailiange transfer, subsurface scattering, and...crates.

Additionally, the allens are adapted to a lowgravity lifestyle, so expect a truly otherworldly environment with zero-G mechanics once you make your way inside the ship," Variety even takes to the skies surrounding the epicenter. where Crytek translates its commitment to freeroaming vehicles (and love of fighter-jock flick Top Gun) into jet combat.

GRAPHICS

Yerli, who dismisses id Software dynamo John Carmack's megatexture technology as neither new nor truly proprietary, is giddy about his own game's CryEngine 2. This is programming that talks-even more so in eye-tickling motion—and programming he loves to talk about, "Gameplay-enhancing graphics" are his watchwords; delivering a vision, not empty razzle-dazzle. Yerli canvasses Its features as follows:

Dynamic terrain destruction and deforestation: "The ability to effectively modify terrain through the destruction of objects (trees and foliage in particular) creates emergent gameplay possibilities. Examples; Demolish a tree so that it falls across the road, creating cover or

obstruction. Crack a frozen lake, forcing your opponent to fall into its loy depths."

3D environments: "New and innovative pathfinding techniques allow us to create scenarios that take place in three dimensions. The zero-gravity environment inside the invaders' spaceship places players in a completely novel situation (in terms of gameplay, too), while aliens intelligently navigate the topsy-turvy space."

Animation: "Our system allows for the creation of animation sequences that blend smoothly into one another without popping and sliding. CryEngine 2 deals with high-level A.I. system requests autonomously and selects the correct interpolation animations from the database." Cryptic talk aside, this is why Crytek defines its graphics goal as videorealism as opposed to photorealism. Great-looking screenshots aren't enough, since games-like life-move. And so, instead of passing through your point of view, the leaves and branches of Crysis' tropics bend ground it. Rather than living at odds with their environment, feet fall on uneven ground, bodies seemingly absorbing impact.

High Dynamic Range: "CryEngine 2 renders High Dynamic Range throughout. This allows

"EXPECT A TRULY OTHERWORLDLY ENVIRON-MENT WITH ZERO-G MECHANICS."

-CEVAT YERLI, FOUNDER AND DESIGNER

the whole scene to be darkened or brightened in response to an accurate model of the movements of the iris in real time, as well as [provides] enhanced detail in darker areas. Blooming effects simulate the real-world phenomenon of light diffusion through particulates in the air. Look up at the sun while you're in the forest-very cool."

Subsurface scattering: "Subsurface scattering models light as it spreads when passing through partially opaque surfaces such as skin. While the effect is quite subtle, we subconsciously notice that humans in the game, for instance, look that much more organic and lifelike."

Radiance transfer: "Also known as indirect lighting, this models light rays as they bounce about a scene-for example, the red light a Coke can disperses onto surrounding surfaces. An industry first, CryEngine 2 calculates this in real time."

Shadows: "Crysis draws on an algorithm that accurately models the soft edges on felly dynamic shadows we see in the real world " in layman's terms, when a leaf canopy sways in the wind, each and every blade and frond casts a twittering shadow copy.

Palybump 2: "More proprietary CryEngine 2 technology, this reduces ultrahigh-polygon models (5 million or more) to in-game assets while retaining the incredible levels of detail. contained in them." Shawn Elliott

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HALF-LIFE 2:

Valve spills (and hides) more on the next installment

MILLSHOT MAYO DEVELOPER, VALVO BENKE: SHOOLOF HELEASE DATE: FAIL ROOM

LITTLE SURPRISE, PROJECT LEAD David Spayrer is tightest-lipped about the Episode Two teasers we most want him to talk about. Combine Advisors (those pupaelike pods that ultimately escape the Citadel) are the "host bodies" Dr. Brean refers to, aren't they? And his brain/mind is now among them, no? Neither hat nor cold. Drop us a hint as to the nature of the Dr. Klemer's "secret technological advances," we say. And is this the same project Mossman refers to from the Arctio? Nada, G-Man's signature briefcase is missing in the mystery figure's one and only appearance. What gives? Stone-faced again, Speyrer isn't saying, isn't insinuating, isn't even smirking. And perhaps appropriately so, since Half-Life 2's episodic packets play relatively stingy with anything in the way of real plot developments. (better to veil what little is there until later than blow the Ild now). We do know this, though: Episode Two introduces one new weapon (the so-called Strider Buster), a single new foe (the tlny tripod Hunter pictured here), and one set of wheels (a self-propelled battering ram). Speyrer, however, is happy to talk around the episode's hot-button topics..../Shawn Elliott

CGW: Any design elements introduced in Episode One that you intend to elaborate on in the second episoda?

David Speyrer: We think of the episodes as adding tools to our game-design toolbox, so each episode draws from an ever-larger set of gameplay tools and mechanics. It's cool to

realize that so many of the elements that we take for granted today, like the gravity gun or our companion A.I., were risky R&D projects during the development of Half-Life 2 or Episode One, Continuing at that rate as we release more episodes is pretty exciting for us as designers. and for our customers. We'll bring many elements from Episode One forward into Episode Two, but we expect to use dynamic scripted sequences extensively. They allow close interaction between NPCs during compat-such as Alyx wrestling with zombies in Episode One-and because they happen spontaneously, every player will see different interactions at different moments in the game. We see lots of possibilities for this with respect to Hunters and citizens, for example.

CGW: Granted, you're still working this out, but what would you say an episodic game needs to do in order to ensure the attractiveness of subsequent installments? Making us care for a character and then setting us up for her seemingly impending death seems

DS: The main thing we want to do is move the Half-Life story forward meaningfully. We want our customers to realize that these episodes are the continuation of Half-Life and Half Life 2 rather than optional detours from the main story ine. Character and story are fundamental to the franchise, and we intend to keep pushing on those in every episode. Of course, we'll always keep the gameplay fresh and fun by introducing new NPCs, settings, and game mechanics.

CGW: In a previous interview with CGW, Valve managing director Gabe Newell explained that "in Episode Two, there are areas and vehicles that we saw potential in and wanted to push forward." Any chance we'll commandeer a Hunter, à la Battiestar Galactica's Cylon Raider? DS: Sounds cool-I'll have to watch that episode.

CGW: Episode One continues to establish Alyx as a character, and yet, the more life we see there, the less alive Gordon seems-en autistic weapon whose only actions, as Dr. Breen argues, are destructive. Perhaps part of that stems from the decision to avoid putting words in the player's mouth or implement a clumsy "give hug" key-does this sort of assessment concern you going ahead?

DS: Having the player be mute is definitely a design constraint that we struggle with at times, but the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. We worked hard to immerse players in our universe, and hearing Gordon speak would just remind players that they're playing a game. Despite the design difficulties, we still think that Gordon needs to be an empty vessel for the player's personality and emotions.

CGW: When we last talked, you dismissed the desire to learn about new weapons and levels as somewhat pedestrian, at least next to meatler matters like motivation. And yet, from the gravity gun to ant lions, headcrabs to snarks, Half-Life's weapons locker and monster menagerie have helped make the series what it is. Wasn't Episode One a little light on both?



EPISODE TWO



D8: The gravity gun in *HL2* redefined for us the notion of "weapon" in the franchise. So we think that things like flares and saw blades are as important, if not more important, than traditional FPS weapons.

CGW: Valve Intensively tracks and iterates in response to tester feedback. We can imagine a

designer groaning at a player's seeming naiveté in the face of a challenge and cynically deciding to simply mark out a path or puzzle with a flashing icon—in the way certain other mass-market titles have—instead of continuing to tweak less obvious cues. How integral to the success of your games has this philosophy proven?

DS: I can't imagine shipping a game without putting it through our playtesting process. So many of our scenarios, especially our puzzles, went through many rounds of catastrophic failure in playtests. In many cases, there was no way to foresee those failures, much less imagine possible solutions. Because we refine incrementally, we always try the most subtle solution that we think will work and test that before resorting to more heavy-banded solutions. So, yes, I'd say the process is very integral to our games' success.



-DAVID SPEYRER PROJECT LEAD



◆ Diaphragm moving freely, Michael Fuller's Half-Life 2 ant lion attempts the full-lotus meditation posture. Coemic mudral

PLUSH EDITION

MEET MICHAEL PULLER'S COTTONstuffed menagerie, teddy bugbears stitched in felt. Polygon for cloth panel, they're snarks, headcrabs, and ant lions; Hall-Life's organo-granades, head-humpers; and hive-minded man-eaters, only outesier.

Fuller found the idea on Steam's forums: in '04. Talk of a stuffed headcrab in a defunct thread inspired him to pattern his own, pulling geometry data from Half-Life with package-extraction application GCFScape. He then simplified construction and created seams in a second application (Blender), and added finishing touches in... Adobe Illustrator, "At that point," he says, "I laid out all places on sheets of paper and released an Acrobat file of the work on my website" (3d2toy.com, where a growing community of craftspeople share and compare thread-and-needle undertakings). With practice, Fuller's gotten faster and says he can now see a project from design-drafting start to fabric-sewing finish in as few as six: hours..."If I'm dedicated.":

So far, Ediler's sold four on aBay (20 bucks to cover material costs and another \$10 for labor, which averages out to a beggarly \$1.50 an hour). However, having completed everything from chumtoads to a limp-needle crowbar, he's just about tapped Valve's universe and says he'll soon "have to start work on vehicles and miscellaneous Items" or turn. to other franchises for Inspiration.





TEDDY BUGBEARS

PAPER EDITION



SURGEON-STEADY WITH A SCALPEL or an X-Acto, Bhautik Joshi's medium of choice is card stock, not cloth. "The ides," he says, "evolved from part of my Ph.D. work on surgical simulation. I was,

extracting volumetric, deformable meshes from 3D medical imaging data, and texturing the surfaces." The unproductive result: pixel-perfect sculptures of Quake's pointy. shambler, Joshi's all-time fave game character, and a GDF space marine to match. Says: Joshi: "I wanted to preserve the old-school. charm and chunky textures of the original Quake. Plus, I figured that someone else out there would want a shambler as a monitor ornament, too, so I share the models online at cow.mooh.org/paper.".

Next up: more pulp bogeymen, but only after Joshi's completed other more pressing paperwork. "I'm sitting on a big pile of models, extracted and ready to unfold, but I have to walt until I hand in my Ph.D. thesis to finish them. I plan to tackle a few of the more popular Quake models first—perhaps the fiend. and hell knight-and now that I've worked out a way of doing it, some Half-Life models, too...Gordon Freeman, scientists, snarks, headcrabs, even a life-sized crowbar." We're crossing our fingers for Quake Arena intergalactic biker BBW Lucy./Shawn Elliotti...



"Nel Ne, morn, these aren't toys! Now get out of my Slipgate-maintenance cubby."



All templates are available at cow.mooh.org/paper.

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"I think the biggest thing we've learned from WOW," says McQuald, "is that players rightfully expect a high degree of polish—in terms of gameplay, UI, or anything else, for that matter."



Hardcore and proud of it: Vanguard wants to lure folks away from WOW with increased challenge, meaningful player housing, and the intriguing field of diplomacy.

VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES

Life after 60?

PUBLISHER, Sony Online Entertainment Developer: Sigil Games GEARF: MMORPQ RELEASE DATE: Winter 2008

PREVIEW

THE STATS AT MMOGCHART.COM tell us that over 50 percent of all MMO players hang out in World of WarCraft—makes you wonder what kind of masochist would ever dream of making another one of these massively risky monsters. But Brad McQuaid, former EverQuest mastermind and current CEO of Sigil Games, developer of the upcoming unapologetically harder-core, high-fantasy Vanguard: Saga of Heroes, thinks his game offers something that the Horde ranks don't: "Freedom," for one thing. "The ability to customize characters to a degree yet unseen in MMOs. Vanguard is more challenging, too—though challenge does not mean tedium."

So what to make of the fact that the corpse runs—EverQuest's primary tedious fun-killer—are still a stubborn part of Vanguard's design? "If you die in the depths of a dungeon, the

penalty should be higher than if you die on a hill just outside of a friendly village," explains McQuaid, "But when you die in Vanguard, an entry in your travel journal leads back to your corpse. Right around level 10, the level where you'll first need to do a corpse run, you'll also have your first mount." In Vanguard, these range from the usual horses to ships to flying mythical creatures, all of which pull doubleduty as pack mules. McQuaid also expects players to carry multiple "situational" sets of gear with their mounts (which stey with you even after death), "We've pretty much eliminated the 'naked' corpse run that turns so many people off-and rightfully so." OK, you've got our attention-go on.

Vanguard also offers a reason to get excited about player housing: mobility. "Many players will want to keep their houses near areas designed for their level range, and as they level up, they'll be able to move—making their

previous plot of land available again for new, up-and-coming players," McQuaid says. "Because these houses can be placed near adventure or harvesting areas that are around the same level range as [players] are, we're not talking about long travel times back to your base of operations."

But Vanguard's loftiest desire is to bring the disparate spheres of character development-in this world, adventuring, crafting, and the experimental field of diplomacy-into harmonious alignment. "A highlevel, multisphere encounter might be one where you need diplomats to convince the guardians of a dragon's lair to permit you entrance," says McQueid. "You enter that lair in search of extremely rare dragon eggs-that goal being different from your original stated intent—that might be protected by dragons, in which case you'll need a high adventuring level to handle the encounter. Then you need to employ high-level harvesting skills to obtain the eggs.... You then sell the eggs or use your own crafting skills, perhaps leading to the production of a very rare and powerful potion." But potent enough to break the almighty grip of WOW? Sean Molley



"WE'VE PRETTY MUCH ELIMINATED THE 'NAKED' CORPSE RUN THAT TURNS SO MANY PEOPLE OFF—AND RIGHTLY SO." —BRAD MCQUAID, CEO, SIGIL GAMES

COLUMN

Scoring free games without that loky "pirate" aftertaste

HOW'S IT GOING, MAN? MY JACKASS ROOMMATE IS OUT OF TOWN, SO C'MON IN-GRAD a seat. Sorry, let me get some of these pizza boxes outta the way. Say, you hungry? I think I got some extra silces…over here…no. Hey, do you mind checking right behind you? I think there might be a slice or two under the cushion. No, not that one. There ya go—that's it, Man, lan't summer vacation sweet? For a change, nobody's here to complain about how big a slob i-am. All I need to sweet is where my next gaming fix will come from. OK, maybe that and finding where I left the remote. But before solving that great mystery of life, I should focus on a more important task: finding come.gool free games to keep me out of direct sunlight for a couple more hours./The Freetoader





Penumbra is this incredibly cool-looking survivalhorror game. Well, "horror adventure." Whatever, anof oute, cuddly critters go at it is hearing their man. Point is, at some time during the demo. I guarantee you'll double-check behind you to make sure nothing's creeping round the bend.

The built-from-scratch graphics engine matchright now, and the game won't cost you a lousy penny. That alone earns it my coveted Cheapo's Choice award. The detailed, freakish creatures: rate high on the creep-c-meter—reminds me. of that feeling I get whenever Paris Hilton tries! to think. In fact, I'd bet that even the zombified flying turd moneters in this game have more neurons firing than she does—they're constantly on the hunt for you. Barricade a door, and they'll. knock it right open. Top that, Hilton.

Objects operate just as you'd expect. You' have to pull out drawers to look inside, and what game is complete without some box-stacking: physics puzzles to reach other areas? Hey, notcomplaining here. Just sayin', is all.



The only thing better than watching an army wee bodies squish like overripe tomatoes. Base Invaders' concept is simple: Protect your base, a tower at all costs from armies of miniralders. Build walls, lay down traps, or just use your se just about anything you'll see on store shelves? Wirtual hand to grab and chuck enemies across the battlefield. It may sound like a cakewalk, but it's not--not by a long shot. Waves of invaders awarm the neighborhood, not content to leave until the place is a wreck. Kinda like when i the family's in town. Then, when you finally beat: them all back and take a deep breath, you get maybe a whole minute to recover, set up more defenses, and get ready for the next attack.

The sound is the other half of the fun here, Grank up the speakers to hear the goofy effacts and music—I guarantee you'll get strange dooks from anyone within earshot. Seriously, the: neighbors started peering through my windows; making weird faces. This game is so out there ithat I can't help but love it...



Some call me the gangster of love. Some people call me Mau-rice-woo-hool--/cause I speak of the pompatus of loccove." OK, I seriously doubt someone intentionally named? a game after some Steve Miller Band lyric. But it sure would be awesome if they did.

MMO publisher GPotato (GPotato? WTF does that mean?) takes a risk here by making: its shooting game available for free-with a: few strings attached. Space Cowboy Online technically follows the letter of MMO law: You get different classes (well, they call 'em "gears") of ships that you directly control. Go on solo missions, dogfight other players, and, as you level up and upgrade your intergalactic. rig, form 40-player brigades for some seriously hairy space combat.

Remember how I mentioned that there were: a few strings attached? Well, technically, you can get in free. However, if you want to get to the good content and higher levels, you need . to pony up some cash. The extra stuff may be good-I'm just too cheap to find out.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY AUGUST 2006



THE GOOD

MALE-LIFE 1 IPISODE ONL Proof that ablacely conten-can mean more than just "expansion pack"? Maybe

Europa de la Mile point Even more so man Half-Life 2 proper, Episode One offerthree-dimensional characters (and we're not just talking about graphics), great writing and intelligently wought environmental pur des. And the commentary mode gives how meaning to the word replayability.



THE BAD HALF-LIFE S: EPISODE TWO

The perils of episodic con-tent reveal themselves as we now have to wait five

months to many durishman happens to Gordon and friends. There's a 0.5 percent chance the average American male will be dead within that time frame. But the teaser trailer at the end of Episode One (spoilers shoy) certainly did its jou visions of new locations and a maybe-dead Alv. On wall, he better than walting five weers



THE UGLY BATTLERIELO 2 VES PATCH

The Battlefield 2 v1.3 patch EA released in June broke the browser and Introduced crash

to-desktop problems across the board—no PC is: safe. The bright side, DICE has a fix ready. Back to the clark side. They're not releasing it until the next regularly scheduled patch, which won't be for a while. DICE is working on a new map to go along with it, and they plan on putting the patch through a public beta period prior to release.

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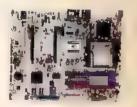
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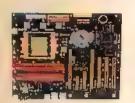
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THE GREAT DIVIDE

IF YOU NEED PROOF THAT THE GULF BETWEEN PC AND CONSOLE garners is real, then Live Anywhere—Microsoft's online-garning olive branch allowing Windows and Xbox Live players to face off in the same games—is it. When Microsoft launched the Xbox console in 2001, we all harbored a secret fear that the company would let PC games wither and die in its pursuit of console ascendancy—but that didn't happen. Instead, it embraced both as siblings with different audiences and different assets.

"It's really about user preference," says Peter Moore, corporate vice president of Microsoft's Interactive Entertainment division. "In the past, Windows gamers have been accustomed to playing games with a keyboard and mouse, and many gamers prefer this."

But the distinction goes beyond interface. Mitch Gitelman, studio manager of FASA (currently at work on cross-platform Xbox 360/Windows shooter Shadowrum), says that PCs offer an intimacy and intensity that consoles don't—the difference between what he calls a "two-foot expenence" and a "10-foot expenence": "A two-foot experience is right in your face, so the visuals and audio can be more subtle. A 10-foot experience requires bigger and bolder sound and visuals to get you excited from that distance. It's kind of like the difference between watching a movie on a 30-foot screen and watching a play in a theater. On a big screen, the actor need only narrow his eyes to be menacing. On a stage, he might need to move into another character's personal space."

Bul Louis Castle, vice president of EA Los Angeles and executive producer of Battle for Middle-Earth II, is currently in the unusual position of bringing an RTS already available on the PC to the Xbox 360; he feels that intimacy is a function of genre and interface as much as platform. Of RTS games, he says "The mouse and keyboard are inherently selection devices that imply a level of abstraction. The [360] controller is a direct-Input device that implies a more intimate connection to the actions you're controlling." But the same can't be said of a game like Half-Life 2, where a player's mouse movements and Gordon Freeman's onscreen motion are as cozy as can be.

Still other dynamics define the divide: "A PC player is usually savvier in terms of hardware and system tweaking," says Todd Howard, executive producer at Bethesda Softworks, whose once PC-only Elder Scrolls RPG series is now one of the Xbox 360's flagships. "A console player just expects it to work perfectly."

"The price of fu. (PC and console) systems affects the market," adds Diarmed Clarke, project director of the upcoming PC version of BioWare's Jade Empire. "I'd wager that your 'average' PC owner is less likely to be into anime than an Xbox or PlayStation 2 owner is." Indeed, the high cost of entry—and upkeep—is constantly touted as one of the barriers to PC garning. But just how big a barrier is it?

"Windows lets users do much more than just play videogames...[It also allows] word processing, web browsing, and e-mail," says Peter Moore. "So hundreds of millions of people out there already have a very viable gaming machine right on their desk." And with escalating console prices (the high-end PlayStation 3 will cost \$599), that "work PC" suddenly grows longer legs as a gaming device. What's more, console licensing fees mean that Xbox 360 versions of games often cost \$10 to \$20 more than their PC counterparts. Tomb Reider: Legend, for example, saits for \$59.99 on the Xbox 360 and \$39.99 on the PC—and, as most gamers tend to buy a couple games every month. It doesn't take long for a console's TCO (total cost of ownership) to keep pace with a PC.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

In the world of game development, which comes first: the console or the PC? In 2001, Bethesda revealed it would be bringing the third Installment of its Elder Scrolls series to the Xbox at the same time as the PC—a decision that startled fans familiar with the game's first-person, nonlinear role-playing (and decidedly "PC") nature. Since then, Bethesda's been fighting the notion that it—and other developers—tend to "dumb down" games for the allegedly simpleminded console set. Take the lock-picking and persuasion minigames in The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, for example,

A SEPARA

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em? After years of discor

which many critics felt screamed "console concession." Howard dismisses that assessment

"They came from the desire to have each skill have some gameplay," he explains, "Elder Scrolls has a Security skill and a Speechcraft skill, in Morrowind, you didn't get to actually do anything with them. So it was our goal to make those skills more interactive, as opposed to just clicking 'unlock' and waiting for a random dice roll. That was the whole thought process, to somehow create interactive 'dice rolls,'" in other words, not just to provide "thumb candy" for fidgety console gamers.

And what of Oblivion's interface, which prompted modders to create their own PC-friendly version in the form of BTmod, which PC players downloaded in droves? "I think people are reacting to the [large] font size, not the interface mechanics themselves," says Howard. "We talked about having a small-font option, as it's not hard to do with the XML-driven menu system, but we didn't have a nice way of switching between large-font XMLs and small-font XMLs; it was one or the other. So we went with the larger font on the PC, hoping that would work for the majority of users. But I think BTmod is great, and I'm glad someone did it."

Howard even counters the assumption that PC players dig first-person while console kids prefer third-person views. "Regardless of platform, people play Oblivian mostly in first-person. We've actually seen more people try third-person on the PC—people who have been playing a lot of World of WarCraft."

In the end, Bethesda found that it didn't have to dumb down its games; console gamers were ready to rise up to the developer's intent, "For the games we create, I've found that PC and console players both expect the same things "says Howard. But he acknowledges that the move to consoles did have some limpact on gamepiay. "We learned a lot about making things easier on a first-time user by working on a console—I guess because it just forces us to think differently. Those kinds of things like nice tutorials, easy controls, limiting button usage... benefited both versions."

By contrast, Mathieu Girard, producer of Ubisoft's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, does find differences worth accounting for—though these differences creep up from an older divide. "A large and influential community emerged with the first episode of Ghost Recon after its release five years ago," says Girard. "They appeared to be very demanding, but also very involved.... From the beginning, this community has been very sensitive to the specific aspects of the game—such as the advanced tactical orientation—and, as a result they have been pushing the game over the years.... [So] GRAW for the PC has been specifically developed for the PC community."

When crafting GRAW for the 360, Ubisoft recognized that the game would likely be reaching a new audience, so accessibility was essential. But when designing the PC version, Girard felt they had to trust their roots, "Immersion was key," says Girard—It's the two-foot-versus-10-foot difference, "That's why we chose the first-person representation rather the third-person view [of the Xbox 360 version]. Also, we did not focus on direct action in the PC version as we did on consoles, but more on strategy and factics. We remade all the art assets: the game engine, A.I., and behaviors are all different; and maps are easily twice the size on the PC." As for the PC version's tack of a save-anywhere option in favor of "console-style" checkpoints: "To reinforce the tactical aspect of the game," says Girard, "We did not want gamers to just carelessly run out like in some other FPS."

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

Where Oblivion and GRAW seem to stand as examples of cross-platform done right, PC gamers are more than familiar with ports gone wrong—translations of otherwise well-designed console titles such as King Kong or The Godfather that don't take advantage of current PC tech and end up looking shoddy and stale.

Matthew Guzenda, senior producer of Crystal Dynamics' Tomb Raider.
Legend, says that money is the motive, naturally: "Most PC versions of [PS2 or Xbox] titles were just high-res-texture versions of the console versions. If you wanted to do normal maps or dynamic lighting, you pretty much had to 're-art' the game, which adds pretty significant cost to development—and most companies don't deem this worth the additional cost."

TE PEACE

PC and console games unite in an uneasy alliance.



ORADAR SEPARATE PEACE

But the next-gen-console regime change offers a glimmer of hope, "Up until now, there has been a big difference in the lighting models between PC and console

titles. PCs, for some time, have been able to handle per-pixel lighting models, but because the PS2 can't handle per-pixel lighting, most console titles are vertex lit-no normal maps, dynamic lights, and other such stuff you generally see in PC-only games.... The Xbox 360-and soon, the PS3-changes that. You can use similar art techniques between [next-gen consoles] and highend PC graphics cards."

Guzenda's own game, Tomb Raider: Legend, shipped simultaneously for the PS2, Xbox, PC, and Xbox 360. And while the PC version's "standard" mode reflects PS2 and Xbox tech, the Next-Gen Content option makes much better use of your \$400 graphics card. "The PC version of Tornb Raider is really two versions of the game," says Guzenda, "There's a complete set of textures for the standard version, which are high-res versions of the Xbox and PS2 textures. Then there's another full set of textures and lighting data for the Next-Gen Content version based off the work that we did for the 360 and PC

Translation: New consoles can actually be good for PC gaming-at least when it comes to ports. "There are no longer any differences in the production environments of PC and console games," says Kijong Karig, producer of Webzen's

upcoming cross-platform Huxley. "Console games can be made by applying the know-how used to make PC games, with little effort."



TERM THAT A PC WILL BE ABLE TO DO THAT A CONSOLE WON'T.

> -MATTHEW GUZENDA SENIOR PRODUCER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

ensure that keyboard-and-mouse players are not at a disadvantage."

> The producers of Huxley, an MMOFPS promoting cross-platform play, have pegged segregation as the only fair approach: "Keyboard and mouse are controllers op-

> timized for FPS games," says Webzen's Kang, "and the Xbox 360 control pad is no match for the strengths of the mouse Rather than tone down (each platform's) strengths to compensate for different weaknesses, we decided not to let 360 and PC players play on the same battlegrounds. The players on the two platforms will. however, be able to enjoy certain content together...related to communications in which minute differences in controls do not affect fun "

"The early feedback [on Live Anywhere] is incredibly encouraging and superpositive," says Scott Henson, product unit manager of Microsoft's Game Technology Group, "but gamers will ultimately decide if we're crazy or not...and the less time developers have to invest in infrastructure—authentication, billing, matchmaking, friends lists, messaging, and so on-the more they can focus on making a great game '

But Live Anywhere isn't without its hazards. One possible side effect; more PC games being built with the limitations of an inevitably inferior console in mind, "A console is static," says Bethesda's Howard, "The PC is an ever-evolving, highly customizable machine. It's fluid. This allows a game coming out next week to use new hardware, or some new way of connecting to people, that a console cannot do," Even now, the Xbox 360 "nps

larger restrictions in memory compared to the PC," says Kang, "so such restraints must be taken into account in production."

THE LIVE EFFECT

The cross-platform connectivity offered by Live Anywhere, Microsoft's upcoming service that allows 360 and Windows players to play with one another, complicates matters—the most immediate conundrum being how to deal with the platforms' fundamentally different control schemes. The folks at FASA, makers of Live Anywhere's shooter "spokesgame" Shadowrun, don't think the controls have irreconcilable differences; "The menus are the same, and the HUD is the same," says FASA studio manager Mitch Gitelman, "Only the Input devices are different." Early versions of Shadowrun. compensated for the PC's keyboard-and-mouse advantage by being more forgiving toward 360 players in aiming, but the developers are still chasing the perfect solution. "One advantage that Xbox 360 gamers have is that their controllers rumble, which tells them when they're magically healing or getting shot. A mouse doesn't rumble, so [our designers] have to find ways to

THE GREAT CONJUNCTION

Alarmist conspiracy theories aside (is Live Anywhere just a Trojan horse designed to get us "used to" the console way before Microsoft pulls the rug out from beneath Windows gaming?), convergence seems to be the inevitable conclusion. "I believe that one day, there will be no real difference," says Henson, "You'k be able to play anything you want on one device and choose the depth of experience and control with a glorious lack of complication."

"I'm sure I will offend some gameplay purists," says Guzenda, "But I can't really think of anything long-term that a PC will be able to do that a console won't, or vice versa. Short-term, the PC is still going to be the platform of choice for MMOs and RTS games because of the keyboard...(but) I don't think we're very far from the point where every PC user will have a gamepad and every console player will have a keyboard."

Some wars bear no winners—just uneasy truces. Sean Molloy



The PC version of Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter opts for a first-person perspective; the Xbox 380 version uses a third-person view.

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FAS WELLS

COVING SOLON

DARK MESSIAH C

Holy fireballs! First look at the upcoming fantasy shooter's wild multiplayer mayhem

DARK MESSIAH, ARKANE STUDIOS' IN-YOUR-OWN-EYES TAKE ON Might and Magic, is more than the real-time strategy series writ singleplayer FP5; its LAN/online modes are more than just fentasyland maps player PP5; its LAN/online modes are more than just fentasyland maps loosely repurposed for the multiplayer mob. "What we don't want to be," says producer Romain de Waubert de Genlle, "It a poorty executed brilliant idea, instead; the one-time Bettlefield 1842 lead designer wants his work here to leave in the long term, as his previous game has. His and Arkana's challenge; to innovate beyond the gying bastlon of by the numbers deathmatching while integral ing gameplay form-fit to the game with a magic making campaign mode and swords-and-sorcery combat. I Shawn Elliott

PURLIF ON Union DEVELOPER: Arkene #6 GENRE: Action RELEASE DATE: September 2000

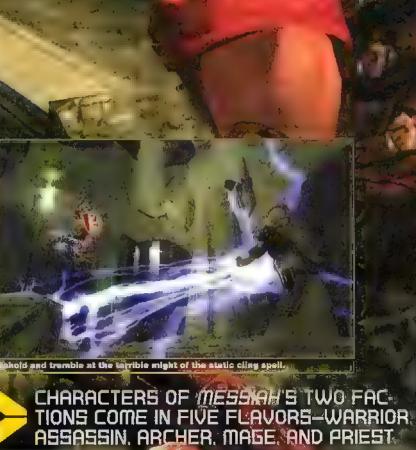
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MIGHT AND MAGIC

CAPELESS CRUSADING

Arkane would rather Messiah's multiplayer content create new conventions unique to swords-spells-and-shadows slant than phy appropriate aspects of existing sci-fi and military shooters, in other words, if arrows stand in for guns and healing spells serve as realth packs (which they do), the game needs something more—or the difference is only skin. deep. Says de Waubert de Genils: "We face a few specific constraints that the into the nature of the project. First off, meles combat is more; prevalent in Dark Messiah than in any other shooter to date, and that means that we've had to imagine the system from the ground up and then adapt the game's balance accordingly." That constraint alone creates several consequences. How, for instance, would Arkane evenly match long-shooting archers against meles-only warriors? This is a challenge met by creating the Charge skill and supplying the latter class with more stamina to pursue fleeing players. Then, to mitigate these new advantages, Arkine introduced the priestess-based Slow spell that allows wand-wavers to hobble sprinting opponents.

To underscore Messiah's Tolkien-rooted family tree, Arkane is looking not so much to shooters but to fantasy gaming's traditional stomping grounds: namely, level-based roleplaying. Hence Crusade mode's five-chapter. campaigns on as many maps. So where Battlefield 1942's now-typical control-point system brands Messiah's action, it's World of WarCraft's PVP bettlegrounds and honor system that inspire its structure. Messiah's party members apply collected experience points, to their characters' progress over the course of serial encounters, beefing up accuracy, staming, and armor while learning to apply poisons, set traps, amplify spalls, and more. In addition, Messiah's multiplayer uses conceptually evolving maps to suggest narrativewithout actually inserting story, so to speak. "We convey continuity between maps in two, ways," says de Waubert de Genlis. "First, they dovetail visually. Stand at the far end of a human map where you're nearing undead : territory, and you'll see the architecture and environment change. Plus, it's the outcome of the previous match that determines the next map that you play on, not the server's map cycle." /



FANTASY FRAG

Blocking is possible; parrying, too-Dark: Messiah's hand-to-hand combat options are comprehensive even as they diverge from those that define unplugged play. "The multiplayer melee system is similar in that it's played from first-person and it allows you to perform: most of the moves from solo play, such as strong and chained stasties," says de Waubert de Genlis, "But, because players obviously"; act and react in ways All, won't-meanings. that they move faster and are less inclined to remain in front of you-we had to adapt. So we introduced more options to the mix, connecting most of them to skills, specifically the warrior. and assassin classes' aggressive charges.

Conan-cut warriors - Messiah's most heav lly armed and armored character class—lop. heads when properly positioned and rely on a stamine-sapping rush to close the gap for their gruesome coups de grâce. Misjudge distences, however, and the warrior not only deals no damage, but also finds himself too fatigued. to follow up with other life-taking offensives. Three solutions to countering the schlemici: Backpedal, stutter-step aside, or lean on abracadabra to slow the louts' advance. Once the warrior's buil-rushing, he can't break off.

The assassins' blitz, on the other hand, autotriggers when allent-but-deadly sorts alip behind rettlebrained quarry. "They'll miss if the target is moving fast," says de Waubert" de Genlis. "Otherwise, evasion is out of the question, and the rush might deal damage to multiple opponents." Solution: Stay mobile and survey your surroundings...especially when you're a mage or priest and must stand stockstill when casting certain spells. "In the end," : de Waubert de Genlis argues, "It adds variety and verve while preserving the unique feeling. of fighting in first-person." In order to deliver, we'll add, Messiah must give its dagger and bludgeon blows gravity. Thwacks-lethal or less-than—should sting in ways the gauzy knife. strikes in existing multiplayer FPSes don't.

ideally, differently classed allies work in concert—and are designed to do so. De Waubert de Gentla offers a trio of examples: "First: An undead assessin stalks some humañs. A human priestess then spots the assussin, and with her special ability, 'marks' him for her team. The once-cloaked assassin is now clearly visible, and the human team receives: a bonus for killing him. Now, say that a human archer fires an arrow that blurs the assassin's vision, allowing a human warrior to finish him off. The archer, priestess, and warrior will then share the multiplied experience points.

"Second: Say a warrior's manipulating a pletform. Since the warrior's exposed and in need, of protection, a mage might decide to cast a sphere to defend his ally against enemy spells. Unfortunately, an undead archer manages to kill the warrior. However, if a human priestess is nearby, she'll resurrect and heal the warrior."

"Final example: Enemy warriors attack three: archers and a priestess. The priestess summons bramble bushes, which slow the attackers, allowing the archers to finish them off."/



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GAMING GREATS

Retrospective: Lord Quest



Meet Dale Koppenhaver, sometimes known as Lord Quest, founding father of the adventure genre. The genius behind the successful Journay Quest series in the 180s. and the Tough Cop Adventure trilogy in the '90s, Koppenhaver hasn't released a game in the eight years since his underwhelming Expedition Banana and the Queel Salads sold only 87 copies./Seanbaby

INTERVIEW

CGW: Thank you for this rare interview, How did you get the name "Lord Quest"? Dale Koppenhaver: Lord Quest was just the first nickname I gave myself that people actually called me.

CGW: Is that why you're crying? DK: No! No. Sometimes I test out puzzle solutions in-real life before I put them in all game. In my new piece, the player needs to protect his headband from being snatched off his head by vultures, so I was seeing if I could secure it to my forehead better with: mayonnaise. A little bit of it is running into my eyes. That's all.

CGW: Sounds like a hard game, but we're sure our readers won't want spoilers. Tell us some about how you got started in the industry, Mr. Koppenhaver.

DKt Please, call me "Lord Quest."

CGW: Fine.

Lord Quest: Out of nursing school, my roommate, Ted, and I, Lord Quest, decided to take our love of reading and combine it with our love of typing. We created our first game: Quest Adventure. It was purely text, but play ers were so imaginative back then, we barely had to even write descriptions...which was good, because between the two of us, we

only knew is adjectives. And four of them meant "lonely."

CGW: After that, you revolutionized the genre by adding graphics....

LQ: Well, I noticed that everywhere I looked, i saw things. Everywhere, So why not add that/ element to a game?

CGW: Which led to the Journey Quest series. LQ: Right. And Journey Quest's graphics took gameplay to a whole new level. Now, not only did players have to figure out what to do with the bucket, they had to figure out that it was 🗷 bucket:

CGW: That thing was a bucket?

LQ: As technology got better, we could make the quests even more challenging. For example, In Journey Quest IV; Curse of the Missing Water Pipe Valve Quest, time actually passed in the game. It actually changed from night to day. This added tremendous possibilities to puzzles. Even if the player figured out to make the key by > throwing the kitten and the bar of soap into the celling fan, they might not know when to do it.

CGW: And still, there was the challenge of the player having to recognize the strange object outside the barn to be a ceiling fan. LQ: Exactly! But we knew we were running out of things we could do with doing things, so we added humor. We were really proud of Boner's

Balls Quest, which was not only humorous. was the first game for adults only. It occupants ed mature situations previously unimagened gaming, And its sequel, Poop: The Game took it to an all-new level. "FART!" Hehaha, 💂 was just thinking back to one of the puzz where the game's main character, Poop: 10 Character, had to sneak past a security guard after a chill-eating contest. Hahahat

CGW: You paved the way for many of today! idevelopers. What can we look forward to in future Lord Quest projects?

LQ: Actually, I may take a break from PC game ing. With all these flashy movie tie-ins like Timecop, American Gladiators, and Home Alone 2: Lost in New York...It just seems that the questing market is dead.

CGW: Blame 1993's Last Action Hero? LQ: That and, well, [gamers] just aren't as sophisticated as they used to be...not as small I know there are still some gamers out there eager to test their wite in a quest for...I mean back then, you used your brain. You had to think to put the tune cans under your armpits to trick Scentar into thinking you were a fish.

CGW: It was an act reserved for the intelfectual elite.

LQ: Are you going to eat that?

COW: That's a pencil. !

YOU ARE IN A VAST CAVERN, EXITS ARE TO THE NORTH AND DOWN, YOU ARE BEING-CHEWED TO DEATH BY A GREEN MONSTER. >> GET MONSTER OFF, DO NOT UNDERSTAND >> SHOVE MONSTERL 1 DO NOT KNOW THE WORD "SHOVE," >> REMOVE MONSTER. YOU ARE NOT WEARING "MONSTER," >> THROW AXE AT MONSTER, I DO NOT SEE A "MONSTER."

SO GO NORTH.

A MONSTER APPEARISH

>> THRIOW AXE AT MONSTER,

YOU HIT THE MONSTER HAS DIED, IT DROPS A RUSTY HAM, YOU ARE BEING CHEWED

TO DEATH BY A GREEN MONSTER.

>> REMOVE MONSTER.

YOU TEAR THE GREEN MONSTER OFF, LEAVING SEVERAL CHEW SPOTS ON YOUR BODY.

Dale broke like the Industry with his text-only hit Quest Adventure.

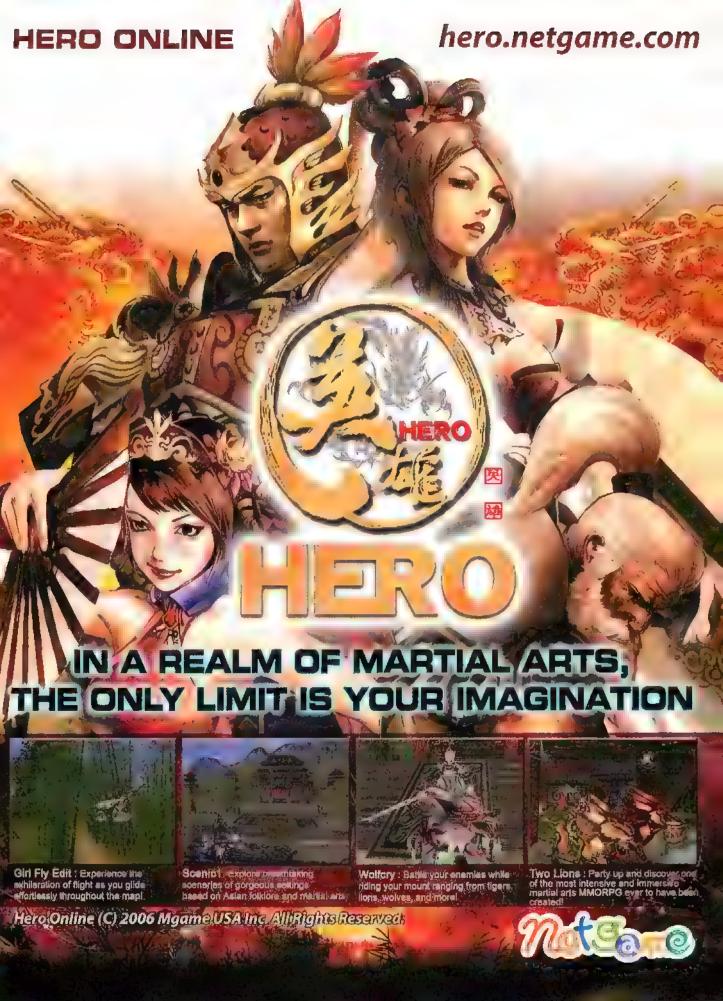


▲ Sayeth Lerd Quest, "Journey Quest was one of the first games to integrate puzzles with solving."



"WE KNEW WE WERE RUNNING OUT OF THINGS WE COULD DO WITH DOING THINGS, SO WE ADDED HUMOR."

LORD QUEST, DESIGNER/PROGRAMMER





PUB., SHER, 10Table Publishing DEVELOPER: 10Table Studios Sjovakia GENRE, Action-RPO RELEASE DATE, Spring 2007

PREVIEW

TAKE TWO PARTS TOLKIEN'S ELF EPIC The Silmerillion, one part Soul Calibur, and a dash of Diablo (gaming's Borg-no one escapes), and out pops the ostentatious-sounding Elveon (pronounced like you're telling one of the Chipmunks to flip a switch; "Alvie, on!"). Elves in full plate that look like the product of a Ronnie James Dip and Sir Laurence Olivier pairing-what would E. L. Fudge say?

Forged with behold-it-and-weep Unreal Engine 3 tech, Elveon furnishes a story-driven campaign set in a fantasy world called Naon, where gods and elves once lived side by side in peace. Ah, peace-what's It good for? Somewhere down the line, war erupts, and suddenly it's Gods and Eives Gone Wild. You play one of these elves in third-person, developing skills in different combat schools, cruising through levels, and fighting e aborately modeled enemies whose physical collision points drill right down to sword ends and spear tips.

But melee-intense action games are only as good as their camera angles and controls-and in that regard designer 10Tacle's aiming to deliver, "We implement a dynamic camera model that adapts to combat situations, always showing the relevant action in a way that lets players see what they're doing," says Elveon's managing director Slavo Hazucha, noting that special moves or decisive actions get their own slow-mo zooms. But dramatic close-ups on lanky pointeared dudes in body armor?

"Elves are a heroic and popular race," explains Hazucha, Surely Orlando Bloom and R. A. Salvatore wouldn't argue, "Our game and fantasy universe depict an ancient era where the elves are still a cunning and dynamic force on the rise " Think Fabio turned Roman centurion—in other words, not the spindly, diminutive fairy creatures of legend. Or those little fellows on your careal box. Snap, Crackle, and Pop in cuirass and greaves? Not here, thankfully Matt Peckham



III "IT STARTS WITH YOUR CHOICES OF STEEL

Swinging swords plays center stage in Elveon, but you'll actually have four weapon classes to toy with: damage-minimal-butdual-wieldable daggers, slow-but-smashhappy two-handed swords, bows for ranged attacks, and spears for smacking around several combatants at once. "During combat, you'll have a ton of options," explains Hazu-cha. "On offense, you've got basic, advanced, and expert-level attacks, plus combos and special kill moves. And on defense, [you: have] blocks, quick dodges, and strates. Your choice of weapon and armor affects your performance." So heavy-armored spearmen may be slow but deliver brutal damage to: quicker, more aglie dagger fighters, while the latter can dodge almost every attack and retaliate with deadly speed but relatively weak damage. And you can pack up to three weapons in battle, swapping on the fly to deal with tactically unpredictable opponents.



For much of the game you'll be fighting other elves, but 10 Tacle promises plenty of "hostile interaction" with divine creatures.



Character development supports the action aspects of Elvenn by letting you choose from several possible combat paths...



...You can become an expert in one school or an "all-rounder" who knows a bit of everything but excels at nothing.





Wield the weapons of the mightiest warrior heroes in the first historical strategy game to let you fight from the front lines. Command an army on the field, lead an invaston field to criemy lands, and fight alongside your troops at the hour of crists to turn the tide of battle.

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CGW: According to Warren Spector (CGW #264): "Outside of Tim Schafer, I can't think of too many truly funny people in this business." Citing the repetitive nature of games and developers' inability to completely control timing. he also argues that "the very nature of games works against comedy." Your take?

Tim Schafer: I feel the opposite way—that games are inherently funny. Because you have this totally out-of-control, improvising actor on the stage: the player. And you're trying to write dialogue and script behavior for all of the other poor actors who have to share the stage with him. And if that player actor wants to jump on your head or punch you or drive over you with his car, you need to come up with a response or some set of rules that will help the supporting actor come up with his or her own response. And for me, it's much easier to improve comedy than drama. It's really hard to come up with a meaningful, dramatic reaction to the player when he jumps on your head. Maybe if Warren were improvising with that actor, he would keep it in the dramatic vein, because that's his style. I just find it hard not to comment on the ridiculous things the actor is doing.

CGW: Well, you definitely get a lot of praise for your comic timing. Is it difficult to write a funny game, as opposed to writing funny dialogue for another medium? How do you manage to keep up the hilarity?

TS: The main thing is that it's not just me-all of my games had incredibly funny teams working on them, I don't know how things ended up that way. Maybe we just got lucky. Or maybe [former LucasArts designer] Ron Gilbert gathered a bunch of funny people together to make Monkey Island, and those people just kept working together. Same thing is true for Double Fine [Productions]—an unusua, amount of truly funny people work here. And when you put a group of people like that in a room together to brainstorm ideas for a game, their natural inclination is to crack each other up, and that shapes the game you're making.

stablishes Double Fine Productions after

Jeaving LucasArts in 1999. Spends the next several years developing *Psychonauts*, which gets canceled by Microsoft in March



CGW: Where do you go for inspiration when you're designing games?

TS: Different places for different games, For Grim Fandango, it was obviously both film noir and Mexican folkore: For Full Throttle, it was Hunter S. Thompson's book Hell's Angels. For Psychonauts, it was a lot of my own personal memories of being a kid at summer camp. And also my psychic abiities. Those helped inspire me. And they helped me steal ideas, too.

CGW. Including ideas on how to run an Independent studio, it seems, is Double Fine your sweetest gig yet, or do you find yourself wishing you could go back to working for a big publisher?

TS: Being out on our own, with a company where we can make our own culture and set our own priorities-that's definitely the sweeter gig as far as I'm concerned. People assume that the trade-off is stability; they think that big publishers are more stable than independent developers. And it's true that independent developers operate without a financial safety net. But, hey-we've never laid anyone off because of money. The big publishers lay off hundreds of people at a time just to save money. You get a lot more loyalty at a small company, both to and from the employees. And that's just a nicer. way to work.

CGW: Do you have a tough time getting publishers excited about your original IPs?

TS: Actually, publishers are all really hungry for original IPs. .but if the IP is original, then they usually want to play it safe on the gameplay-i.e., rip off Grand Thaft Auto. If you're doing something interesting with the gamepiay, then it had better be a licensed property you're doing it with. They're just trying to minimize their risk, which is understandable. But if you're a developer who wants to do innovative gameplay and an original IP, you can still do it, but you really have to have a good idea--and be prepared to fight for it.

CGW: Despite Psychonauts' lousy sales, we're glad you fought that particular battle. Has it been difficult for you to get funding for further projects, or has Psychonauts' critical acclaim opened doors?

TS: When talking to new publishers, having a game that sold millions would've definitely helped. But in the end, Psychonauts didn't hurt us too much, because all of the publishers we talked to held the game in high regard...and many of them liked to preg that if they'd been in charge of it, it would have sold much more

CGW: Psychonauts did have lot of Tim Schafer-ness about it. But at its heart, it was a platformer...do you intend to return to that genre? Are there any other game genres where you feel you could make your own sort of personal comic, visual, and storytelling style work? TS: Well, it's almost impossible to get a platformer made these days, but I do still love them. There are other game genres too, that I'm excited about working with. I think any game could be made better with a well-done story and interesting visuals. Any game genre could have humor,

CGW: When anyone criticizes a story in a videogame, the response is often, "If you want a story, go read a book!" Do you think it's possible to tell a compelling, book-worthy story in a videogame? Do you even worry about that?

TS: Most of the stones in games, I have to say, are pretty awful. Some of the best ones are merely forgettable. I'm not surprised that anyone would think games would be better without story, but people don't really know what they're missing. A great story, if told in a way that doesn't hinder gameplay, makes any game better, , so it's kind of a guest for me, to try to make the story as good as possible so that even people who think they don't like story will like it. And maybe then they'll even start to demand it from all their games

CGV/ So what games had some of your favorite stones?

TS: I've been trying to think of one for about five minutes now, but I can't, Maybe there's a great story in a game that I'm just forgetting, but I'm really having trouble remembering what it is. Games have a long way to go before their stories can compare to what's offered in the best books and movies.

CGW: Five favorite games of all time, then? TS: Super Mano 64, The Legend of Zelda: Ocanna of Time, Tomb Raider, Skies of Arcadia, and Kataтап Патасу

CGW Tim, you console fanboy. Back on the subject of PC games, are you working on anything new? We're hearing rumors....

TS: Yes, we are working on something brand new right now. But it's still under wraps, so I can't say anything about it-except that we're all really excited about it and already having funplaying it. Double Fine is kind of in Willy Wonka mode-you know, where the factory doors are shut and nobody can know what's going on Inside. Just us Oompa-Loompas, tolling away, stirring the secret chocolate.

CGW: Have you ever considered pursuing animation or other forms of media where innovation and off-tho-wall ideas seem to be more welcome (à la Oddworld creator Lorne Lanning)? What keeps you making games? TS: We've talked to some people about making a Psychonauts movie, and I can't say I found film people to be any more brave or experimental than gaming people. I mean, when was the last time you saw a movie that was half as creative as Kataman Damacy?

Still, I totally understand Lorne's frustration. The business side of getting a game made is incredibly demoralizing. Many forces align to discourage creativity and encourage mediocrity and safe, derivative ideas. But for me, those same forces are part of the reason I keep going; they just make me so mad. I can't stand the thought of those jerks winning. I feel so lucky every time I get to make another game, because every time we make something good, it's like punching those jerks in the face

CGW: OK, last question. Since the prospect of another Monkey Island game is virtually nil, please shed some light on this eternal question for us: Just what is the secret of Monkey Island? TS: Oh, that, I don't know why Ron won't tell people that, It's simple: [Recurring Monkey Island character) Herman Toothrot has both male and female reproductive organs./

ALCIEIN THE DESTRICT THE Fittest

PUBLISHER, Atari DEVELOPER: Edon Studios GENRE Survival-horror RELEASE DATE 2007

DBEALEM

"WE'VE BEEN INSPIRED BY TV SERIES like Lost, 24, and Prison Break," ealys David Nadal, game director for Eden Studios' upcoming survival-horror specimen, Alone in the Dark. "We're addicted to these series, and we wanted to capture that capilivation in terms of narration."

Hence Eden's novel approach to the trendy notion of episodic content: Unlike Ritual's SINC Episodes or Valve's Half-Life 2 installments (see raviews on pgs. 80-81), Alone in the Dark will* be sold as a full 'season' of 10 to 15 episodes. (roughly one hour aplece) right out of the box—allof the recurring peaks and cliff-hangers, none of the annoying five-month waits. "When you put the game down and when you come back, Nadal, "you'll be presented with 'coming next' and 'previously on AITD' clips. The beauty of the episodic format is that we have the option of releasing 'lost' epjeodes after the game ships, as well as additional ones, in various formats."

If you're not convinced that the epleodic structure (gimmlick?) is any different from traditional level structure, there's more to AITO than that: Eden is trying to "evolve" past the genre's traditional awkwarm soften and statue and medallion puzzles, ching the console (and PC. come September) game Resident Evil 4 as the first title to successfully break the mold that its ancestor (and the original Alone in the Dark long, long ago) helped create: "When RE4 came: out, there were some aspects of it that were

similar to what we're doing in A/TD, and this: comforted term provers do want an evolution; a renewal, even if it could be risky."

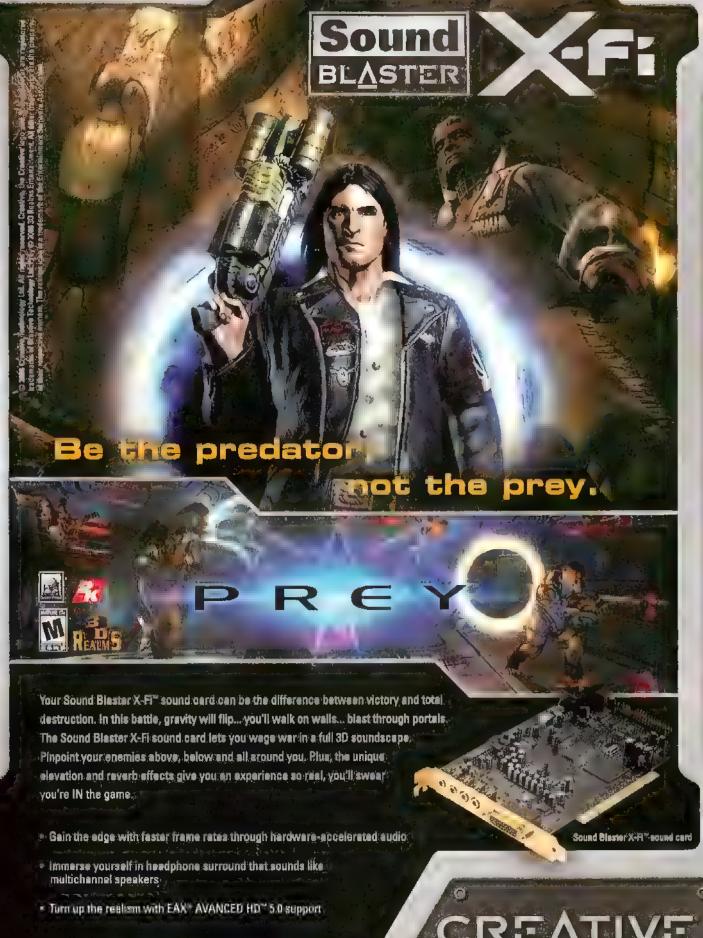
As for evidence of evolution: AITD takes place in New York's Central Park—Eden's attempt to take surviving horror out of endless hallways and out into the open. And in expanding title stage, Nadal hopes to expand the areenal. "We have your typical handguns and similar weapons," he says, "but we really want players. to Imagine. What happens if the enemy can't be killed with builets?" Eden alms to make the environment your weapon, keeping players* eyes on their surroundings to combat the scary things in the environment are built type, acydu'il be able to interact

that may sound like an alternate way to ay "our come has physics and rolling barrels," Lip a car interior as a concrete ple: "Imagine the front of the car is being atled, and the player jumps into the backsest to nide behind and avoid the attacks...players can use the centralized locking system to lock the car doors, use the headlights to light up a darkarea—the car la fully functional, as one would expect in real life." Other evolutionary evidence is a little more anomalous, including the howmuch-control-iz-too-much-control ability to blink protagonist Edward Camby's eyes at will—to. -> wipe away visions of Lovecraftian madness, we'll assume. But, as Lovecraft would tell you, assuming can get your face torn off by the Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath./Sean Molloy



Assortifia





us,creative.com

CREATIVE

GLADSTONED

THE BETTER HALF

HEY, DARRENT ARE YOU EVER GOING to stop playing Hise of Legends and write your column?

*Taste my industrial might, you fifthy Guoti bitchesi".

Fine! Then I'll do it. I mean, seriously, it can't be that hard. Yes, I'm the "lucky" lady-Darren's flancée, Amy. And I-like so many other modern women-have to deal: day in and day out with a significant other who spends a significant amount of time



Manny Calavera is the other man in her life.

playing games. The biggest problem for me is that, half the time, I can't tell if he's goofing off or playing a game for work. ⊲

The thing about marrying a gamer is that you end up with this grown, nerdish manchild wearing a Strong Bad T-shirt and playing New Super Mario Bros. on his DS Lite.... can't believe that I even know what these things are!

Since the beginning of our relationship. Darran has constantly tried to get me: involved in his hobby/job. I'm not saying that i don't appreciate it; i'm just not into videogames. Well, that's not entirely true. I did love playing Myst with my cousin as a child. Unfortunately, Darren heard me say that: once, and he's held onto hope ever since. He'll say, "Hey, you've just gotta try this game!" Um, no I don't. America's Next Top Model starts in five minutes.

"You've got to be f***in' kidding me! No way could be get past my defenses! I'm an iron goddamn aurtaini"

Then, on a flight to New York, I watched Darren play Grim Fandango to pass the time. And I've got to say—it actually looked interesting. You're this grim reaper who goes: around solving puzzles, and it has a cool Casablanca feel to it. Now this was a game

could get into. I don't have to kill anything. and I'm not some fake-looking beens with giant boobs.

After four years together, he finally figured me out. All he had to do was play a game in front of me that I might like no pressure, no begging—and quietly hope I'd show some interest, I've since beaten his ass at Bookworm, solved Indigo Prophecy, and helped him create countless City of Heroes characters. The worst for me, though, was: The Da Vinci Code, Darren knows that I really loved the book, so he brought the game: home. One night, I direned out an a party. to stay home and play for five hours. What has he done to me? You know something's wrong when you'd rather play a game than plan your wedding. 📑

"God-f***ing-dammiti A motherf***ing City of f***ing Vengeance?! Ah, crap. Hey, Almi I'm done. You can use the computer now!"

'Kay, gotta go! Byel/Amy...er...| mean Darren Gladstone



Darren Gladstone Got a bone to pick with the future Mrs. Gladstone (or Darren)? E-mail darran aladstoneli zilldavis.com.



"YOU END UP WITH A NERDISH MAN-CHILD WEARING A STRONG BAD" T-SHIRT AND PLRYING NEW SUPER MARIO BROTHERS ON HIS DS LITE:

DEVELOPER'S DESKTOP What games are they playing?



ENTERTAINMENT'S Tom Mustaine works overtime to get the first season of SIN Episodes on the sir. When he len't on deadline (or stuck answering our dumb र को है सिता है, तर ,

والله والروادين these games again.

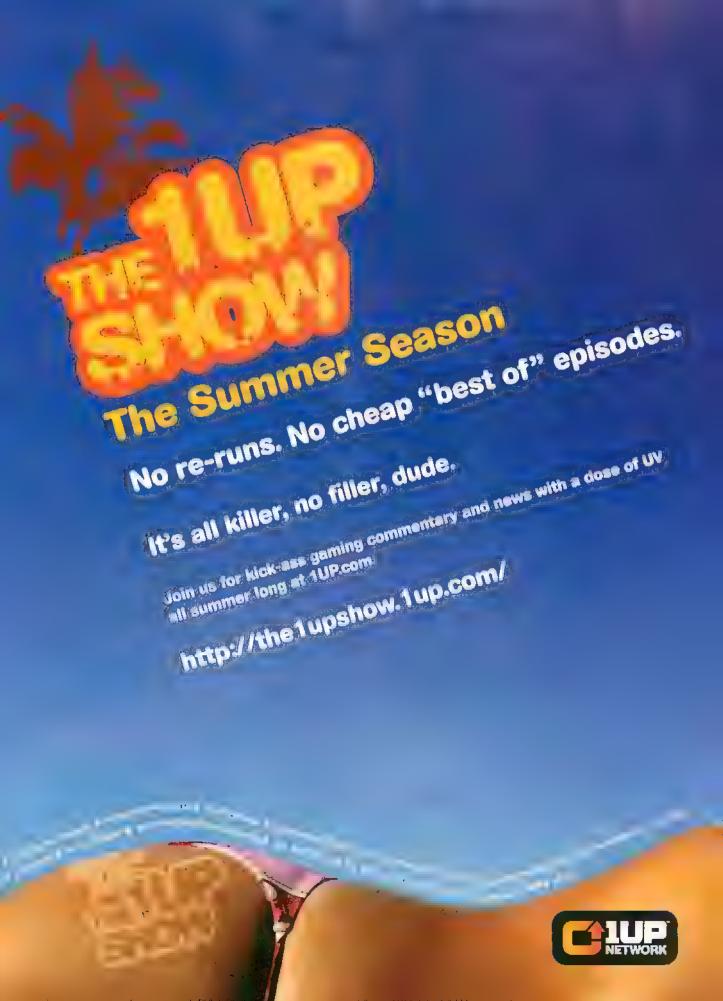
M.U.L.E. - "Mining for Smithore and Grystite on the planet frata is still amazingly fun to this day, M.U.L.E. is one of the most subject subje made—I still frequently play this one oldschool game.

NUCLEAR WAR - "Based on the board ten to the more many it and to be com-replayable and always fun. Setting up a 100-megaton nuclear warhead gets an awa-inspired "Occoohihit!" from the audience. Then firing it over at Ronnie Raygun's or Kookamamie's city that just launched a propagande attack my way? One word: sutisfaction."

ULTIMATE DOOM - "Shooting demons never gets old in my book. The first episode of the original *Doom* was just so perfectly done; I can play that episode over and over Then, the final episode of Ultimate Doom offered a challenge for the most hardcore Doomers.

Alice & Description of the same or grant in disappeared thanks to this game. Just about every dollar i cerned went toward honing my Ryu and Gulle skills, along with trying feverish-ly to best the game without losing a round in order to get the supersecret special credits.

Hallita en met keep me from going nuts on a desert island, but the gameplay always keeps me coming back for more. This is one of the few games that took over my life for months—after the first multiplayer session with friends, I would spend days trying to derive the optimum build trategy to outwit the computer and friends The Island would allow me time to sharpen those skills."



Stalk 'em by four « stufft. in fi sich (din. et.

PREVIEW

*AGORAPHOBIC? GET OVER IT-South Korean dev Webzen's punchedup hybrid role-playing shooter Huxley literally swarms you with opponents. In treeless cities where Orient meets Occident, up to 5,000 twitchy gunslingers per server strut and scramble through neon-baked boroughs crammed with clubs, pube, arms barkers, and Soviet-style slabs of ruddy concrete playerpurchasable housing.

The skinny? Near-future climate change blisters the earth white a mysterious substance splits humans into two species: Saplens and Alternatives, each fighting for an energy source created by their wouldbe sevior, the inscrutable writer-Aldousinspired scientist named Huxley. Haggling and mission mobilizing occur in each side's city (a third houses a hostile NPC race of monstrous Hybrids and Integrates Xbox 360 players, who can fight for their liberation), while battles shake out in external "zones" supporting up to 200 simultaneous combatants. With street dates still a full year away, we caught up with Huxley producer Kijong Kang tor a fill-in./ Mutt Peck him

tyle brawls sounds pretty ir some black you manage the chatter?

Kijong Kang: If everyone communicated in open channels, chaos would erupt, so squads are the basic unit for small-scale communications, and squad leaders serve as hubs for other communications units. We use units and hubs to keep it simple. Think four-player squads fighting in 200player-maximum battle zones—though, of course, individual, nonsquad play will also be possible.

CGW: What about audiovisual communications? How do you plan to mitigate "overtalk" or "cross-babble"?

KK: We're supporting VOIP cross-platform for both the PC and Xbox 360 versions, but VOIP support without care can result in audio mashups, as you say, especially in tactical communities. So voice comms will be free and open in squads, but only squad leaders will be able to communicate with other squads. In other words, the squad leader becomes the communication hub.

GGW: Does Huxley's campaign story have at terminal point?

KK: Huxley's base story does have a finishing point, but it simply leads to the start of another myetery. Not a repetitive chain, but, retinatione story's and will be connected to another's beginn At the start, you'll be developing your character and learning about the history of the world. Alone the way, you're setablishing your lotters, making money and such, but once mat process. complete, you'll experience a radical shift. In the first story campaign, for instance, you join a group that you've been fighting as an enemy, then have to develop a reputation in that group, and so on.

CGW: With Xbox 360 and PC players fragging in tandem, won't keyboard-and-mouse jockeys havean unfair advantage?

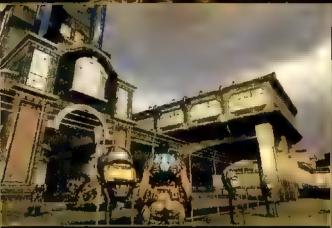
KK: The disparity between a keyboard/mouse interface and a control pad is Inherent, and we can't overcome it, but the control pad has its own merits. We guarantee that each interfacwill be enjoyable without obstacles: [And] actually not a full-fledged war between PC players and Xbox 360 players, Instead, their relationship will be mutually cooperative. For example, if an Xbox 360 player must get by some enemy, he might drive a vehicle taking advantage of the control pad's analog stick while the PC player hops on back and frags energies by utilizing the keyboard/mouse. In other situations, we might offset an Xbox 360 player's control issues by putting him behind an exceptionally powerful turret to guard against PC player incursions, it's intuitively ocoperative.

ORDER OF OPERATIONS: PVP

No one's going to accuse Webzen of thinking small, but Huxley sounds remarkably focused. This won't be World of WarCraft with contiguous borderiess regions and a dozen races—the idea in Huxley lette get you running and gunning as fast as possible.



Whether fishing for bettles, scoping missions, or just plain loitering, everything pivots around Huxley's persistent cities. Sapien players startihere in the expansive megalopolis Nostalonia. If you think it looks affittle empty, just imagine up to 5,000 players anading its streets and structures, in cities, you'll form clans, trade weapons and armor, buy goods at market, and grap for your next quest or tussle./



When you're ready to frag, just locate a transport and hopa ride to the Battle Map of your choice: from straight-up deathmatch and capture-the-flag layouts to finger-sizzling 100-on-100 PVP battles.

Even in (relatively) small 32-player online FPS brawls, battles can take forever, and you needn't look far to find players feeling lost in the iray. How to handle shootouts that are six times as crowded? "Four-player squads are really central to gameplay," says Kang, explaining that squads must remain within a certain range of each other. "Squads are all about perks. Squad leaders can help up fallen members and speed their shield or HP recovery, or increase their attack and defense points depending on the squad type."

But what's really interesting is how Webzen's planning to integrate all those squads into broader groups without suffering "playground bully" problems. "Say squads with improved attributes come together to wield more power," proposes Kang. "As more and more squads aggregate, their perks start to weaken or suffer penalties, so even if a small number of squads form an alliance to achieve great destroying power, the numbers for the destroying power of one squad are actually higher. Thus, players keep away from squad gathering, and they naturally come to fight on a squad-to-squad level."





THE DISPARITY BETWEEN A KEYBOARD/
MOUSE INTERFACE AND A CONTROL PAD
IS INHERENT, AND WE CAN'T OVERCOME IT, BUT
THE CONTROL PAD HAS ITS OWN MERITS.

-KITONG KANG PRODUCER

in someone's day.





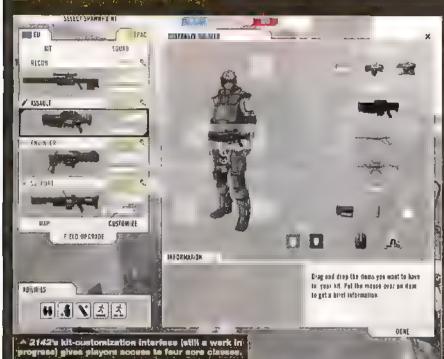
Once you're in a Battle Map, you'll great your teammates, attategize, then ecramble. In this control point map, teamwork and tactical finesse are essential to secure key locations and hold them against individual squads or entire platoons of opponents.



Once your side habe a control point, you can either dig in or leave the uses and risk losing to the opposition. Deciding what to do in situations like this will often hings on equad commanders, who can communicate with each other to execute broader taction flourishes like platoon links-ups or battle-line lesignogging.



REVISED RUCKSACK



2142 ABANDONS BATTLEFIELD 2'S fixed classes for a more modular solution: four flexible base kits, each comprising two categories of specialization (paired sniper and speciops slots, for instance). Crackerjack play nets access to a pool of kit-specific, persistent upgrades—40 to 45 varieties of guns and gear that, when combined and recombined, magnify the infantryman's means to the enemy's end.

"The rationale behind the system is simple, says Nilsson. "Conforming to a small selection of prefab kits is somewhat limiting, and this way we can make sure things feel fresh month in, month out. Starting with four core classes

establishes a stable, flexible foundation. Trust me—a completely wide open, customizable system with no classes doeen't work. But beyond that core, we're handing the customization over to the gamers. Our job behind the scenes is to make sure that every possible custom outcome is balanced against every other possible outcome...ho problem, right?" That Nilsson leans more toward tongue in-check than cooksure is encouraging, as anyone with experience knows better than to believe in absolutes when tester-tottering checks and balances.

"Balance is a delicate matter, and we've made our share of mistakes. Battlefield Viet-

nam's M60/LAV combination made the support soldier totally overpowered; in a split second, it became the only class people played. Obviously, that isn't fun. Imagine yourself shouting for a medic, but finding only assault soldiers because their kit is the best." Nor does variety in principle guarantee the same in practice. Think Diable It's googolplex skills, which promised "unpredictable" PVP contests—in which everyone was either a meteorb sorceress or whirlwind barbanan.

"Nothing substitutes experience," Nilsson says, "and we've gathered info about
how people play our games over the years.
Our software determines where people play,
spawn, die, and what they're doing during
sessions. After we have an alpha version,
DICE plays for 12 hours a day to find potential,
exploits and errors. And again, it demands
iteration, as all items are interconnected in
ways impossible to assess without planty of
time to play-test and tweak." Finally, DICE
enlists fans to ferret out the unexpected in
beta tests. (Now if only they'd meter and curb
possibilities for antisocial practices such as
forced teamkills in addition to unfair play.)

2142's mix-and-matchable gear not only offere ongoing incentive to rice through the ranks (a much more rapid process here than in BF2), but for players to work with one another, too. Sustained commitment to a single aquad (and adherence to its leader's commands) generates points for the group, which members can then spend on equipment atherwise accessible only to those of higher rank. And while access lasts: only as long as you stay in one squad (perks persist across map changes so long as you'rein the same server), the feature insures against buyer's remorse, doubling as an opportunity to test-drive before signing on the dotted line. Suspect the EMP mine, which cripples vehicles and confuses turret traversal, is more your style? Try it and see./

I CLASH OF THE TITANS

2142'S TITAN MODE ATTEMPTS TO predictably channel player activity. especially where public players aren's always tuned into the strategic and tactical value of specific targets. Instead of selzing capture points and sapping "tickets," you sink the other side's commander-controlled airborne warship—first nuking its shields Death Star-style, and then boarding the craft in pods before mushroom-clouding its reactor core. "While Titan mode makes people think more about the end objective. and the importance of controlling sectors, Nilsson says, "the sandbox experience is: still central. We still aren't forcing players down a particular path; we want to fine-tune environments and scenarios that naturally attract action, while assuring no two games are ever the same. It's a fine line, but one: that we've focused on nalling throughout the history of the franchise."



"Taking out a Titan is tough," he continues, "and we've designed it so teams need to spread resources around the battlefield to assure victory. For example, after taking the opposition's shields down, you still have to think about its strategically placed missile siles that can attack your Titan, quickly turning the tide. Then, Titans are huge maps-within-a-map with multiple choke points, so fighting is frantio without feeling forced with overt.objectives."





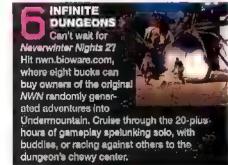
THE HOT SHEET

TEN THINGS THAT ROCK CGW'S WORLD



BATTLEFIELD 2 AUTOLOADER

Explosions, crashes, and cursing-and that was before your Battlefield 2 match even started. In-game server searches used to end in misery, but not anymore, Launch the BF2 AutoLoader (battlefield2) .filefront.com), doubleclick an open server, and jump into the game.





DROKEN SAINTS: THE COMIC EPIC

Four strangers from around the globe share apocalyptic visions. No, it's not anime—Broken Saints is a noir graphic novel brought to brooding life with mes-

merizing comic-book-style visuals. This DVD set collects the original Flash-hown Web episodes and adds a full-cast volceover track.



ming stadium rawk, where have you been?"

WOLFWOYNER

Sometimes you don't need synths, turntable scratchmasters, or fancy producers-sometimes you just need rock. With with the ferocity of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, Wolfmother's debut disc makes you ask, "Head-slam-

RISE OF NATIONS:

We knew that the RTS sequel to Rise of Nations was going to be good, but damn. Rise of

Legends does an emazing job of uniting the conquer-the-world Riskstyle maps of RON with a deep story line that ... blends three genuinely unique factions...



FINAL DESTINATION 3 T

Seares and quality aside, this horror movie has a neat twist for its



DVD release: At key "Choose Your Fate" moments, you decide how, when, and if people die. This steers which alternate takes of the film you watch. Any chance we can decide who writes the next script?

THE POLITICAL GAME 4

Don't worry if your natural gut reaction to playing the Web-based Darfur is Dying (darfurlsdying.com) is "This game sucks! I keep losing!" That's the point. Sometimes life just Isn't fair,

THE MATADOR Can a mild-mannered businessman be friends with a burned-out hit man? Pierce Brosnan plays the flaky "facilitator of fatalities" with perfect pitch in this black comedy.





MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM 4

Itching to get the bigscreen gaming experience on your PSP? Monster Hunter Freedom does a surprisingly good job of

submerging you into its gorgeous handheld world. Stalk prey online with friends, or stay offline and continue not talking to the scary people on the bus.



FISTS OF

Nikola Tesis and Samuel Clemens—buddies, con men, and professional ass-kickers. Both must take down the evil J.P. Morgan and... ult...Titemas Edlean? Graphic-novel writer Matt Fraction either has an awesome imagination of a tinfoil hat to keep out alien mind-control rays.

upcoming gamesi	4
JULY 2006	PUBLISHER
OlvCity: Rame	2K Games
Civilization N: Warlands	2K Games
FietOut 2	Vivendi Games
Fuel	DreamOatcher
Glory of the Roman Empire	CDV Settware
Mage Knight Apocalypse	Namce Bandal
Fray.	2K Games
AUGUST 2006	
Dungeon Slege (I	Microsoft
El Materier	Cenega.
Madden NFL 07	Electronic Arts
Ship Simulator 2005	DreamCatcher
Speciaz: Project Well	Tri Synergy
TimeShift	Atari
Train Master	Tri Synergy
UPO: Matrotorrestatión	Tri Synorgy
SEPTEMBER 2006	
ArchLord: The Legend of Chentre	Codemasters
The Aura 2: Sacred Rings	BreamCatcher
Consult (V	Vivered Commun.
Ceti of Junrez	Ublaaft
Company of Heroes	THO
Dark Messish of Might and Magic	Ubisaft
Faces of War	Ublsoft
Enemy Territory: Quake Ware	Astivision
Lego Ster Warn III: The Original Trilogy	LucasArts
Manager .	Сиранныйни
Neverwinter Nights 2	Ateri
Reservoir Dogs	Eidos interscrive
Scarriots: The World in Yours	Viventa Games
Splinter Cell Double Agent	Utrineft
Manyfisht Legendi.	2N Games
OCTOBER 2006	

Principles Confliction

Unreal Tournament 2007

The Burning Crusade

FALL/WINTER 2006

REAR, Extraction Point

Balliorield 214E

Star freid Legacy

Comme D

World of WarGraft:

Sid Meier's Railroads!

Tubula Rosa

Sepa

2K Games

пСкап

Midway

Blizzard

ASSIVE

Electronic Arts

Witemail Garman

Bathesida Softworks



More fun while you get more done.

Get the power to do more at once with the Intel® Pentium® D processor's dual execution cores in the iBUYPOWER Dream 2006.





JEPOWER - VE BULL IT, WOLLDELAY IT.



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HAL-BO TURBS



15.4" Wide Screen WXGA TFT LCD 1280x800 Display Inter® Centring™Dup Mobile Technology

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MS WINDOWS® XP Media Cepter Edition 2005 w/ Service Pack 2 NVIDIA® GeForce™ 7600GT 256 M8 PCI Express 3D Video

1024MB_DDR2+667 Memory Serial ATA 80GB Hard Drive Removable 8x DVD±R, +RW Drive Build-in Web Digital Camera Gb Ethernet LAN & 56K Modem 3x USB 2 0 Ports

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Intel® Core® Duo Processor 72400 ,2MB L2Cache, 1,63GHZ, 667 MHz F58) inters Core¹⁰ Duo Processor T2500 (2MB L2Cache, 2.0GHZ, 667 MHz F58) Intel® Core™ Duo Procestor T2600 (2MB L2Cache, 2.16GHZ, 667 MHz F5B)

MODESTON LEGG





15.4° Wide Screen WXGATFT LCD 1280x800 Display ntei® Centi na™ Duo Mobile Technology

- · Intel® Core¹⁶ Duo Processor
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1024M8 DDR2 -667 Memory Serial-ATA 80G8 Hard Orive Removable 8x DVD+R ±RW Dove Gb Et Jernet LAN & 56K Modern

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- Break the limits of performance. Your Intense applications and \$D games demand the most out of your processor, AMD Athlon™ 64 FX processors fulfill that demand with leading-edge performance, an integrated memory controller, duat-core technology, and fast HyperTransport^{ra}technology, Stress your system—run the latest 3-D games and multi-threaded applications at Jaw-dropping speed.
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- Reduce the bottlenecks. A fast processor is one thing, but a fast computer system is another. HyperTransportTM technology featured on AMD Athlon^{1M} 64 FX processors is the key. With a 2000MHz doubledata clock rate, HyperTransport technology provides a fast and lowlatency connection throughout your computer system. With free flowing data, you can feel confident your applications are operating at their maximum potential.

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NIGHT DREAMER FA





NVIDIA® nForce® Spt. Stilp* Dual PCI Express Motherboard
MS WINDOWS® XP Media Center Edition 2005 w/ Service Pack 2
Tuniq Symmetry Gaming Case
IBuypower® CPU Liquid Cooling Technology
Corsair 1024MB DDR2-800 Memory
Serial-ATA-II 300GB 7200RPM 3Gb Hard Drive
16x Double Layer DVD±R/±RW Drive
AMD AI
16x DVD-ROM Drive
2 X NVIDIA® GeForce® 7600GT 512MB DDR3
44
16X PCI Express Video Card - SLI Enabled
45

10x DVD-ROM Drive
2X NVIDIA* GeForce** 7600GT 512MB DDR3
10X PCI Express Video Card - SLI Enabled
B Channel Surround 3D Premium Sound
10/100/1000 MBps Ethernet LAN
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- Multi-tasking with extreme performance. Stop juggling applications. With the AMD Athlon[™] 64 FX dual-core processor, you can run multiple
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 , editing or enjoying your favorite digital media. Explore the possibilities of extreme multi-tasking.
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O AUG. 2006 NO. 265

THE LAST WORD ON THE BUILDING AND TRIUMPHANT NUTC GAMING.

FORGET ABOUT WHAT S HOT and what s not-anyone can tell you that. Over the course of the next few pages, CGW[]s know-it-all editors take PC gaming[s overhyped, overexposed egos down a peg and put the overlooked underdogs up on pedestals./

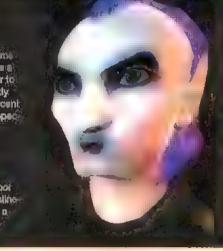
GAME FEATURE OVERRATED. CUSTOMIZABLE FACE TECHNOLOGY

You moticulously craft the visage that screams "you"—adjust the chin angle, slide your system millimeter farther apart, match your irls color to the highlights in your hair—and then promptly cover it in a garish holmet and spend 99 percent of your time playing from a first-person person tive. Looking for a mirror, no doubt.

UNDERRATED

ONLINE MATCHMAKING

We can think of countless examples of how not to do PC friends lists, meeting rooms, and online gaming pair-up services. How sad is it that a console ligured out how to do it right first?



LLISTRATIONS BY Rony Manior







GAME-INDUSTRY VILLAIN

OVERRATED:

JACK THOMPSON

The Miami attorney and antigaming creckpot crueader fan't a real threat-he's just an angry old man shouting at kids to get off his lawn. So let him rant and rave; he'll bury himself with his own lunacy.

UNDERRATED.

PIRATES

You want to blame StarForce copy protection for screwing up computers? Go right ahead-It sucks. Just remember that we wouldn't even need It in the first place if there were fewer pirates sailing the digital seas. Yeah, we're tooking at you.

QUEST

OVERRATED:

KILL 'N' COLLECT A

Mingo tells you to kill 10 migrant workers and take their shoes (feet still attached). OK, you say. Good job, he says-here's a handful of clink for your trouble. But wait, what did those workers ever do to you? Looking back, Mingo's introductory monologue may have contained one Freudian slip too many ('Pleasure to eat you...er, meet you."), but It's too late. The blood of the proletariat is already on your hands.

UNDERRATED:

MORAL PERIL

Glarthir, paranoid wood alf of Oblivion's Skingrad, thinks his neighbors are watching him. You investigate. You make judgment calls based on-gasp!-the personalities of NPCs and-double gaspl-your own ethics. People start dying as a result of your actions, and for the rest of your days, you're never quite sure you did the right thing...but at least you got to make that decision yourself.



GENRE

ADVENTURE GAMES

The days of the classes, and the property ovence ceres are conservator (Wildling) ... Which are then the same of the control of the purpose of the control of the contr continues and the resemble interest

UNDER ZEE

TURN-BASED STRATEGY 📥

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VISUAL TECHNIQUE

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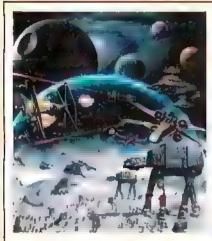
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LEVEL

OVERRATEO:

ANYTHING BASED ON A STAR WARS MOVIE BATTLE

Blowing up the Death Star: fun. Blowing up the Death Star for the 27th time: not so much. And if we have to play through one more Hoth snowspeader level, we're gonna go on a youngling-slaughtering rampage at some unsuspecting day house.

UNDERRATED:

FINAL LEVEL OF HALF-LIFE 2

"Cakewalk," they complain—but instead of tapping the "bigger, badder" trope's grueling progress and impossible boss, Half-Life 2's last level trumps convention with its godlike gravity gun.

NARRATIVE DEVICE

OVERRATED:

IN-GAME-ENGINE CINEMATICS

It started with full-motion video of Kari Wuhrer commanding and conquering while Mark Hamill chewed up the fake space scenery with glant kitty puppets. These days: painful in-game close-ups on graphic mannequine with sutured lips. Which is worse?

UNDERRATED:

NO CUT-SCENES AT ALL

How about we let the gameplay do the talking? Take a lesson from what's been happening in games like Half-Life 2; Episode One, where the story unfolds as

INFLUENTIAL GAME

OVERRATED.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

People tag every open multiplayer firefight as a Battlefield clone for a reason: It's really fun. But folks have a seriously short-term memory, Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis did the same thing and came out a year before BF1942.

UNDERRATED:

TRIBES

If you want to get technical, Tribes iald the groundwork for multiplayer objective-based outdoor battles, team dynamics, and strategy In a first-person shooter. Build emplacements, control vehicles—but the signature jetpacks Inspire either love or loathing. Oh, and bonus: Tribes is now freely available online.

GAMING BEVERAGE

OVERRATED:

THE VERY IDEA OF MARKET-ERS INSISTING WE NEED A GAMING BEVERAGE .

When BillyBob428 signs up for messageboard access and his first post is "What's your fave thirst quencher?" don't buy him. We're Zima men, Bobby-and sadly, they can't afford your services."

UNDERRATED:

THE NONGAMING BEVERAGE

Reading-CGW beverage. Deuce-dropping beverage. Scratchin'-scratch-offs beverage. Pullin -pull-tabs beverage....



mmorps mechanic OVERRATED:

RAIDS -

From the moment you get home from work until three hours after you should've been. in bed, you're assisting the guild—and for, what? Just to give that greedy priest in your guild's old-boy oligarchy yet another Culf of Critical Impedance, while you're atili wearing a Siceve of Moro Thwarting? No, we're not bitter...

UNDERRATED:

QUICK QUESTS

That's right—we like our quests the way we like our /pizza: done in 30 minutes or less. So give us more quick-yet-rewarding missions that won't totally screw with our nocial lives.



RPG CHARACTER CLASS

OVERBATED:

TANK

The way of the warrior: Stand around, take damage, and then aggro the whole damn zone, mietakenty thinking you're invincible. Linchpins to success? Most MMORPG pick-up groups say yes. We say meh.

UNDERRATED:

CROWD CONTROL .

That quiet mesmer/enchanter/illusionist hanging out in the back might not dish out the big damage, but that complex web of debilitating status effects and damageprevention spells is saving your ass in more ways than you probably realize.



BAD GAME OVERRATED:

LEISURE SUIT LARRY MAGNA GUM LAUDE

Yeah, we'll admit it—despite Its lame jokes. nudity, watered-down minigames (guide a sperm cell into a fart cloud? HAWI), and digitized boob (Larry), at least the game didn't crash. Even though we wished it had

ENDERHATED: BET ON SOLDIER

Five things you could've bet on: Voice acting that makes less sense than the WTF?-worthy title; Crisco-dipped characters; frequent crashes; the game being quietly excreted onto store shelves; inclusion in our Overrated/Underrated list

600D GAME

OVERRATED

WORLD OF WARCHAM

Some of us here at CGW have so many freakin' hours logged in WOW now that it (almost) makes us sorry the damn thing exists. And if we have to do Uldaman one more time, we're gonna spaz out. Please, somebody—anybody—give us an alterna-tive to this game already.

UNDSTRUCTED.

No hype, no budget, and before Steam, you'd be lucky to have even heard of Darwinia's Tron-like look at computer life. Packed anugly into its 60MB frame are: strategy, action, creativity, and surrent images you'll remember longer than the latest HDR-lighting extravaganza



ONLINE GAMER **JVERRATED**

MR. DEADLY SERIOUS

Superserious power-levelers and tourney players who start off talking up their state and end up going off about their Yahoo! Personals conquests and gun collections.

GOOFBALL GRIEFER -

terrorist strutting his stuff on a flashing Dance Dance Revolution-mat spray tag Give it up for the good-natured goof-one who make the grind fun again.



PLACE TO BUY GAMES

OVERPLATED.

RETAIL STORES

Drive 10 miles, stand in line behind mouthbreathing morons, and find out that only those who preordered can buy a copy. And they wonder why gamers are violent.

UNDERRATED:

E-TAIL -

Buy games from the comfort of our own homes and download them directly to our PCs? Count us in, it's just as appealing to developers who'd never get their games into atores. We love you, Steam. All is forgiven.

SUPERSPECIAL BONUS COUPON!

Suffering from immersion deficiency? Feering like your 3D environments aren't fully interactive enough? The latest games simply aren't changing the way you think live, or breathe? We ve got the cure! Clip this coupon, and exchange it at your nearest Mega Hype Center today for your very own dose of Buzztastic Superawesomeness (B.S.), Hurry, though—supplies are limited! And remember, kids—if YOU haven't heard about it, it ain't worth s***! NOT YAUD FOR GAMERS WHO CAN FORM THEIR OWN OPINIONS



GAMER STEREOTYPE OVERRATED: CORPORATE-SPONSORED GLAM-GRRL GAMERS THAT'LL, LIKE, TOTALLY KICK YOUR ASS They're hot. They're sexy. They wear designer harn-rimmed glasses and 980 ripped T-shirts. And as soon as they earn enough money, they're going to quit this embarrhesing gig to get far away from geeks like you. UNDERRATED: PEOPLE WHO JUST PLAY GAMES Game publishers



Game publishers are so busy trying to convince the world that gamers are totally hip dudes that they forget most of us are just the same of dorks we've alwaya been. So shut up-and quit telling us how cool we are. We're not. And ye know what? We like It that way.





anxious to ship the game they can't be

bothered to listen.



NEED NOBODY HAS

OVERRATED:

\$70 GAMING MOUSE PAD

Fun fact: Most optical mice these days don't even need a mouse pad to function properly. Swear to god.

UNDERRATED:

THE EASY CHAIR MOUNT .

Tired of loved ones begging you to leave your basement (sorry, "office") and talk to them? The Easy Chair Mount (easychairmount.com), an aluminum atick you bolt to your Le-Z-Boy, lets you spend time with the family while continuing to lance them!

CRAZY MIKE'S DEEP DISCOUNT BIN

BULLET-TIME-ISH FEATURE

OVERRATED: SIN'S "MUTATO-TIME"
UNDERRATED: TEQUILA TIME FROM
JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD

COPY PROTECTION

OVERRATED: STARFORCE
UNDERRATED: STARFOCK'S LACK OF

GRAPHICAL EFFECT

OVERRATEO; NORMAL MAPPING UNDERRATEO; LIFELIKE ANIMATION

AUDIO

(VERRATED: 5.1 SURROUND SOUND UNDERRATED: COMMENTARY TRACKS

FAS MULTIPLAYER

OVERRATED: CONQUEST UNDERRATED: CO-OP

DIFFICULTY

OVERRATED: HARD MODE UNDERRATED: LASY MODE



WASD

OVERRATED: JUMP UNDERRATED: DUCK



- NVIOIA* afarco¹⁶⁴ SLI Chipset Mil. with Dust 10X PCI Express
- GENDINE Windows. XP. Willis Willis 2005 with SF 2
- Cerail: 1024MB PG3200 DDR400: Died Clowed Menery
- 25BTB /200RPM SATA-II 3.0G6/5 NYBHA* Defoice™ 7300LC 256MB BDR3, 10X PCI Express w/ 1V-fini.
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GAMER ULTRA 9900 PRO

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SAM & HAX: FREELANCE POLICE

IN THE MINDS OF MANY OLD-SCHOOL ADVENTURE-GAME FANS, THOSE FIVE WORDS conjure some of the strangest and most hilanous gaming memories ever exploding robot scientists, power-mad country western stars, celebrity vegetable museums. Jesse James' severed hand, and—who could forget?—the World's Largest Bail of Twine. We speak, of course, of LucasArts' Sam & Max Hit the Road, which brought cartoonist Steve Purcel's cult dog-and-bunny-detective comic to the PC way back in ye olde 256-color days of 1993, translating the title characters' offbeat sense of humor into one of the most revered PC point-and-click adventures ever created

In the years following, the Sam & Max faithful clamored for a sequel—and suffered through two false starts (most recently, LucasArts' aborted Sam & Max Freelance Police, axed in March 2004). Then, late fast year, something amazing happened: Small-fry startup Telltale Games (cofounded by LucasArts alumni Dan Connors, Kevin Bruner, and Troy Molander) picked up the pieces and announced that an episodic series of Sam & Max adventures would hit digital-distribution channels in 2006.

And by "episodic," we don't mean any of that walt-six-months-for-the-next-one nonsense that Valve Software's peddling with Half-Life 2. Telitate's ambitious plant a new Sam & Max adventure every month...and even more new Sam & Max content every week. Before we look at where Sam & Max is headed, let's see where they've been—and bring the uninitiated (and thoroughly confused) up to speed. Time to hit the road!

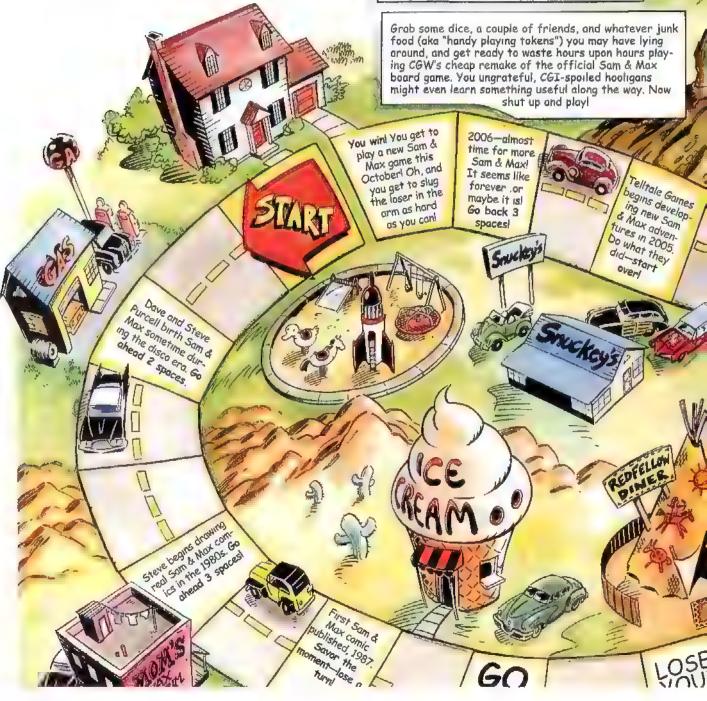
Beats me, Max. Now shut up and smile at the nice readers! BY RYAN SCOTT FINALLY DANCE

Sam & Max 101/

Hey, kids! It's time to turn back the clock with an awesome Sam & Max history lesson-all via an outdated board game, absolutely free of charge!

Sam & Max: Through the Years!

Who needs fancy schmancy computers and Havok-powered shooters when you can play a real game instead?





In the Hot Seat with Telltale Games

Deep in the bowels of Telltale Games' office, surrounded by loony concept drawings and classic comic art, Sam & Max creator-or, should we say, "cocreator"-Steve Purcell takes a moment to discuss the genesis of the Freelance Police with us, "My kid brother Dave and I used to draw comic books," he says. "He had invented these two characters named Sam and Max-a dog and a rabbit. He'd draw these really ambitious comics, and then I'd find them lying around after he lost interest in them and finish them myself in a sort of parody. I'd have the characters doing things like forgetting their own names, making fun of how they were drawn, and killing each other...stuff like that. I came up with the Freelance Police thing later as a way to justify what Sam and Max do."

With Telltale Games' upcoming series of Sam & Max adventures-and we mean that in the point-and-click, traditional adventure-game sense--Purcell and the rest of the team plan to take players on oddball journey that taps

68 > COMPUTER GA

into the style of the original comics, "The comics are kinda onmmer than what's been done in past games," explains senior designer Dave "Day of the Tentacle" Grossman, contrasting the new games' more comic book-ish feel with the comparatively lighter tone of Sam & Max Hit the Road. "A little more dirt on the walls and garbage in the street, so to speak," adds art director David Bogan.

SAM & MAX VS. THE EVIL COREY FELDMAN CLONES

The plot unfolds over a series of six short episodes, "We start off kinda local," Grossman says. "The first episode begins in Sam and Max's neighborhood, with felons who are committing various small crimes." He gestures at an illustration of what looks like a trio of disgruntled fast-food employees; the drawing is labeled "The Soda Poppers." "It turns out they're a group of former child stars gone awry, in the way that child sters always go ewry. And so you start by dealing with them and learning about the people In the neighborhood, Each guy's got a specific thing going on, which ties in with the puzzles."

Mum's the word on specific puzzle content-after all, the team doesn't want to spoil any of the fun. But one early dilemma involves a group of rats holding Sam and Max's telephone for ransom. In another, says Grossman, "You get to lie to a therapist and leigh 'artificial-personality disorder,' which involves inkblot tests, free association, and vivid descriptions of Sam's

dreams. You also get to bonk several people over the head, which is always fun." As in Sam & Max Hit the Road, you control Sam, while Max follows you and occasionally acts as a means to help you solve puzzles. "Max can have a variety of uses, but you'll never control him directly," designer Brendan Ferguson explains, "Basically, Sam's in charge of the investigation, and Max is this non-sequitur force of chaos "

A SWIFLING MIASMA OF SCINTILLATING THOUGHTS AND TURGID IDEAS

Any Sam & Max fan recognizes chaos as one of the recurring themes in these characters' world, and the new game's environments convey this central concept. Take, for example, the Inconvenience Store: "The storekeeper, Bosco, is very paranoid," Ferguson grins, "He's totally into conspiracies. He keeps getting robbed...so he's built this amazing advanced defense system. He's basically made it as inconvenient as possible to shop at his store. So, like, instead of 'Wet Floor,' the sign says 'Beware of Land Mines.' And he's got cameras in the freezers and everything. He's always offering you these great deals-In the first ap sode, he makes this tear-gas grenade launcher that's actually a salad shooter filled with tiny onlone. He's selling these things for exorbitant rates and making all of these crazy demands of you, and once you get it, you realize that it's just this piece-of-junk device. But it works. I mean, it is tear gas. You





go around making everybody cry. That's what Sam and Max want to do, anyway."

One thing that Purcell doesn't want to do with the new games is tread old ground-so don't expect to see adaptations of any old Sam & Max comics, "Sometimes it's preferable just to build the story around the parameters of the medium instead of trying to make one thing into another," says Purcell, "I think Sam and Max provide enough opportunity for stories that it's not entirely necessary to go back and adapt the existing material. Hit the Road is a good example, I think, of a story that has all the flavor of one of the comics, Sam & Max on the Road, without being a direct adaptation."

"Our design goal," says Ferguson, "Is to make you feel like you are these crazy Freelance Police officers, and you can just be involved in all this sort of mayhem. So we do still want to keep that classic sense of figuring out clever ways to do things, but we also want to let you go around shooting up the place, get in your car and drive like a maniao, and pummel and subdue some perpetrators.">













Designing the Freelance Police

"Steve's involved in the [design] process a lot," says art director David Bogan, "He's always drawing for me, which is great. Right up until a model's done—and even after a model's done—he's always sending me little tweaks to fix, which drives us nuts sometimes, But we love it. That's how involved he is. Since. we're doing the episodic approach, we have as pretty small cast of characters, some of which will be reused in other episodes. So Steve feels closer to those characters, and he wants to get into them and make sure they're looking good and they're interesting."



LOOK AT ME, SAM, I'M EPISODIC!

The most remarkable thing about Sam and Max's remarkable thing about Sam and Max's remarkable is Telltale's ambition:
The team plans on rolling out a new episode every month, starting in October, and publishing additional weekly machinima content that advances the plot between episodes. "It's part of the strategy," says Telltale CEO Dan Connors. "We're going to use [the additional content] to fill in the story as we jump from one case to the next, and to help build up the anticipation." Episodes string together to form ongoing plot arcs, with the first "season" planned for six episodes.

Beyond the inaugural season of Sam & Max,

▼ Bosco, convinced that THEY'RE all out to get him.

Telltale offers plenty of other support for the series, including an ongoing web comic by Steve Purcell (which bridges the 13-year gap), a comic generator (for all you creative types), and stacks of T-shirts, posters, and other shameless merchandise.

And, of course, Teiltale expects to produce additional, longer seasons (if the first one does

well, naturally—and with breaks in between to develop new stories), with the possibility of boxed season compilations down the road. New spisodes and machinima teasers will faunch exclusively on the GameTap game-subscription service (www.gametap.com), which currently charges a monthly \$10 fee for on-demand



Bruner and CEO Dan Connors, slong with a water cooler... er, fish tank...er, water cooler...uh, we give up.

access to a whole lotta current and classic PC and console games.

Hmmm...10 bucks for a new Sam & Max adventure each month, rife with zany humor and off-the-wall situations from Steve Purcell and company? We weep tears of joy at the very prospect of watching our favorite canine shamus and hyperkinetic rabbity thing punish more dastardly evildoers in whatever ways they can think of



"WE'RE GOING TO USE (THE ADDITIONAL CONTENT) TO FILL IN THE STORY AS WE JUMP FROM ONE CASE TO THE NEXT."

-DAN CONNORS, CEO, TELLTALE GAMES



- Sam & Max mastermind Steve Purcell lays it all out for us.

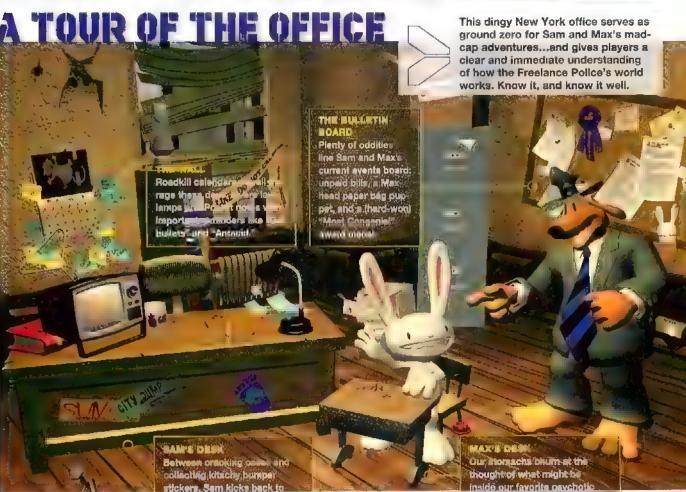


▲ Look for part-time therapist Sybil to exhibit a seriously short attention span when it comes to careers. In the first episode, she moonlights as a tattoo artist.





other episodic series, Sone (eased en Jeff Smith's award-winning comic series). The first two episodes (including the recently released Bone: The Great Cow Race) are available from telitalegames.com, with the: next skapter, Sone: Eyes of the Storm, ___ coming later this year.

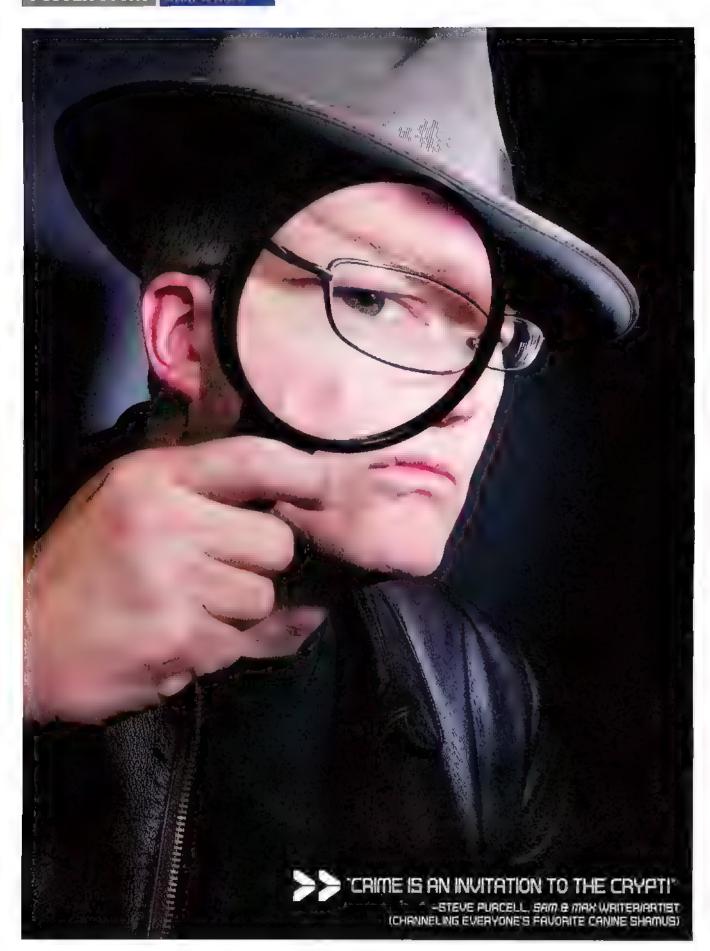








Head over to cgw.1UP. com for an exclusive video tour of Telitale Games' office, as well as video interviews with Telitale CEO Dan Connors, art director: David Bogan, and other people with big, important titles.



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NO MORE REVIEWS

Mindful of the lateness of magazina reviews, we don't print our reviews in the magazine anymore. instead, we publish our reviews. online the day the games come out—you can find them online at http://cgw.1up.com



MULTIPLE SCORES

Yes, we still have scores! We give every game a score when we first: review it online (just look for the 1UP Network score—that's us!). We also list the scores that other websites and outlets gave each game, for additional perspective and points of comparison, ----



BROADER ANALYSIS

These articles are meant to give you the "bigger picture": a summary of our original online review, community and mediareaction to the game, and a lookat patches and updates since a game's original release. In short: it's everything you need to know.



THIS IS NOT A REVIEWS SECTION

The astute among you have probably noticed a bit of tinkering going on with the Viewpoint section over the past couple of issues-namely, the addition of a "Reality Check" box on each featured game noting review scores given to the product in question by major gaming opinion sites.

For those of you who want scores, that's what the 1UP Network number exists for, 1UP's PC reviews-all scribed by the very same snappy writers whose witticisms you're about to read-form the baseline for what you see in this section each month. We include those other guys' scores as a frame of reference for readers curious about some of the other points of view we occasionally refer to-a shocking inclusion for a section called "Viewpoint," we know.

OK, so the headline on this page isn't completely true-but we don't want you to look at Viewpoint as the typical reviews section that you see in every other magazine (hence the name change). Yes, you can find opinions on games now available in stores. Yes, we attempt to provide relatively timely coverage of games you might be interested in playing. Beyond that, we go a cut above the norm in our content thanks to all the elements spelled out in the handy FAQ below. Embrace the change-we definitely have.



EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD CGW's reviews don't concorn thomselves with accred evaluations; you can find these at 1UP.com well before the magazina arrivas. Our Editor's Choloa emblem signifies the best in PO gaming.

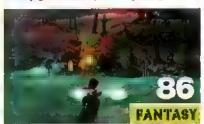




Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends Fantasy meets technology.



Half-Life 2: Episode One Gravity guns meet episodic gaming.



Guild Wars Factions Swords meet soon-to-be-severed heads.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VIEWPOINT

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others rated it. If you still can't decide, read our in-depth review online at cgw.1UR.com.

WERDICT VERDICT





RTS GAMES DON'T OFTEN INCITE revolutions—they make small advances and occasional retreats, and they usually wind up safely treading in territory others conquered long, long ago. This is a genre whose last:

great upheaval came when StarCraft decided its three factions would offer somewhat different gameplay mechanics. And that was what, a eight years ago?

That's why I don't much cotton to Game-Spot's review of Rise of Legends, which says: that "this wacky mishmash of real history, Dungeons & Dragons, and Charlots of the Gods is damn hard to warm up to. Each of the civilizations is so offbeat that there are no reference points, no similarities to RTS conventions that you can latch onto and use to dip a toe into the weirdness." But that's the beauty of it,

really. Familiarity breads contempt—and in a genre glutted with Terran clone troopers and musket-wielding French revolutionaries, even the choking steam clouds produced by ROL's most "boring" faction feel like gusts of fresh air.

EDISONADE AND MOCTEZUMA

And we say "boring" with the utmost reverence: The Italian-flavored, Jules Verne-ian Vinoi family's clockwork men, wobbly flying contrap tions, and ponderous juggernauts provide the game's most obvious link to RTS convention. They're by no means conventional...just easier to relate to than the pseudo-Arabian, pseudomystical Alin (desert dwellers who deal in sand, tire, and—by bizarrely logical extension—glass) or the Mexi-cosmic Cuoti with their death spheres, Cities of Vengeance, and Aztec Power-Ranger space-animal-robot gods. The units:

bottom of the screen) which units are which; if you possess the visual and mental bandwidth ϵ to watch them work, they're all entertaining in. their own right. So does a wealth of creative riches make

and structures straddle the line between car-

to tell at a glance (and from the Icons at the

toonish and exquisitely detailed, and it's simple

ROL the greatest RTS since Star Craft? Notquite. While the game's art-direction coupcertainly merits celebration, the gameplay itself remains firmly entrenched in the genre's: time-tested tactics: expand your base, collect resources (though you get mercilessly little of that here—just Timonium crystals and wealth or energy, depending upon your factions choice), upgrade units to build bigger and better armies until you can roll over your enemy. And while the three sides each have different nuances when it comes to healing, attrition and resource gathering-you can build the Alin's unit-producing Sand Circles even outside your own territory, for example, while the Cuoti's Fanes can lift themselves off the ground and transport units across chasms—they all build upon the same RTS foundation. The

PRODUCED BY RISE OF LEGENDS'
MOST 'BORING' FACTION FEEL LIKE
GUSTS OF FRESH AIR.



Price of for far-flung gampley differences: The sides all seem perfectly harmonized; white you'll need to adjust your taction and buildorder decisions (see sidebar), no faction feels over- or underpowered.

THE TOWER OF INTERFACE

ROL's other great achievement is its ultrarefined and superstreamlined interface, which honestly tries to work with you rather than against you. In almost every potentially magey instance, the game seems to intuit your intent—no need to worry about accidentally loading confused miners or passing trade ships into your army transport's darge bay for frontline deployment. And when you don't have time for interfacial details, you can trust ROL to take care of them for you, allowing you the free mindshare necessary to learn the game's tangled hotkey web, which lets you do everything from the usual Control-key grouping to finding the city where it's cheapest to purchase military districts. And, as GamesRadar warns, "the guy with the steeltrap memory and piano fingers will smoke your. mouse pokes every time." The campaign, fun as it is, makes a poor preparation regimen for

field duty. No matter how well you fare against ; the A.I. (which favors waves of easily conquered miniarmies), cosual contact with surlistic strangers online only leads to despair.

If you do decide to brave the online world, ROL offers a robust and simple matchmakingservice, with a Quick, Battle option and a threepronged "level" structure that tries to match you with equally skilled opponents. Early reviews complained of multiplayer connection issues mostly midgaine drops—but developer Big -Huge Games has since issued several patches (v1.5 as of this writing) addressing some of the problems. We haven't yet run into any postpatch issues (though whether that's due to a gatton that fixed everything or sheer dum) gettin that it to tell), but it would be a shame, if these early technical problems already mount. premature death for ROL's online lifespan: A month after release, multiplayer isn't particularly lively—you can end up waiting several minutes for Quick Battles, and we only found three or four custom games available whenever we looked at the list. Our advice: If you're interested in more than just the campaign mode, make sure you have some like-minded friends.

RISKY BUSINESS

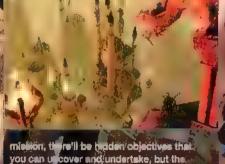
Of course, just sticking with the campaign mode is another option. Like the original Rise of Nations campaign, ROL employs a board game atyle strategic map that lets you pick and choose which battle to take on next, adding a smart simple strategic layer that doesn't divert attention from the RTS core, Enemy neroes wander the mapy too, dividing and conquering on their own but ACL amarily avoids the drag of making you reconquer lost territory, netead letting you purchase autodefending military districts to buttress your former conquests. Each territory, once claimed, offers specific tactical advantages (from more skill points to special powers you can summon during emergencies), and you earn various skill, army, and invention points from districts you build in aiready-conquered areas.

IGN lauds the campaign's inice range of mission types...some are just straight-up slug-fests between you and whoever happens to own the territory. Others require you to defend against a siege, or free people from a massive prison, or chase down and kill a gente who's got something you need. In nearly every



DIVIEWPORT

The Cupit can build only one management of Vengeatics at a time. It demonstrates high cost but the reign of terminates high produced the reign of the reign of terminates high produced the reign of the reig



mission, the re'il be haden objectives that you can uncover and undertake, but the only rawards for doing so are the pride you feel mowing that you did something that you technically could have skipped." Unfortunately, the mission variety really only holds true for the superior first two legs (Vinci and Alin) of the campaign; by the time you get braind the reins of the Cuoti, the story a lost its steam. Its like the designers ran out of objection udeas. Eth, just conquest all the oities on the map, then. Whatever, Haltway through the Cuoti arc, we found ourselves cranking the game speed (which could use a tick mark or two between medium fast and supercrazy last) just to get plow through to the (very loosely resolved) and.

Late-compaign lack of inspiration aside.

ROL provides an exquisite example of real-time-strategy design gone right, from its unique art direction to its evolutionary, actually unannoying interface to its perfectly executed three-party balancing act. Pay no mind to the naysayers who list ROL as a gimmick that soon wears out its walcome-most RTS games wish they had a gimmick this good. /Sean Molley

GANING

VERDICT

Creativity and smart streamlining result in one of the most interesting and memorable "traditional" RTS games in a while.

REALITY CHECK	
IUP NETWORK	9/10
GAMESPOT	7.6/10
EUMERBA	3.5/5
IGN	8.2/10













WHILE MY INTRINSICALLY ANTIsocial nature makes me the ideal audience for a lone-wolf-assassin sim like Hitman: Blood Money, it doesn't make me the sort of guy who rushes online to see what other gamers are

thinking. But I make an exception with Blood Money, because I so love comparing homicide notes with other players, contrasting the quality and manner of my kills in Blood Money to those my fellow murder-monkeys have made. And what I've learned is this: Some truly twisted bastards play this game.

EIGHT MILLION WAYS TO DIE

That gamers are able to have such a lively discussion on death-dealing is a testament to the great level design in Blood Money. Every level handily accommodates different solutions if you want to snipe, you'll be able to find an opportunity. Want to Indulge in the franchize's new feature of arranging "accidents"? No problem—you can always find something to rig or a propun to replace with a real, loaded one. Maybe you'd rather just get hip-deep in corpses—find a nice little bottleneck, toad up on ammo, and start mowing down those wedding guests, because anyone that'd wear a trucker hat to a wedding has got it coming. Twice. True, if you want to get the highest postmission rating of

Silent Assassin, you'll need to follow a fairly rigid, prescribed "correct solution." But, by and large, the world of this Hitman game, from the quiet cul-de-sacs of suburble to the packed streets of Mardi Gras, is one great big deadly playground—and your brains and lovingly self-customized guns are your toys.

Take the mines, for example. Among the many threads at the Hitman message boards over at hitmanforum.com is one simply comparing the varied and many ways you can use remotecontrolled mines to put a deadness into people (since just about everyone in the game is some sort of criminal, collateral damage compounded by morality is not that much of an issue). One poster, SuperJer, racked up the carnage by doubling up on the mines in the New Life mission, planting one mine in the food a caterer brought to the front door. According to SuperJer, after the initial explosion, "everyone in the house runs out to see what happened, and the two limos show up with eight more FBI guys, plus the two from the van. All in all, that's about 20 people on the front porch, where my other mine has been waiting since I casually tossed it there after the first explosion...got the clown, too. Damn clowns." A job well done, indeed...but better than Skeletor, who posted that he took out about 30 evil partygoers by lobbing mines onto a dance floor? Hard to say

And Blood Money has more (a lot more), but you get the Idea. As many ways as you can employ most everything else in your arsenal—as well as found objects, myriad disguises, and simple circumstance—to dispatch your targets. Blood Money practically begs you to go back and replay its 13 missions lust to see how else you can beat them.

SHOOTING BLANKS

have just one knock against Blood Money, but it's a pretty frustrating one: the save system. The series traditionally limits the number of saves a player can make during a mission, but this time out, you cannot reload midmission, saves after ending the game. Terminating any game session means restarting the current scenario from square mother-loving one. Considering how challenging it gets later on to gain simple access to, oh, say, the White House, this can kind of suck the chrome right off your PC case. Other than that, you really can't miss with Blood Money. Unless, of course, you leave any witnesses alive. / Robert Coffey.

GAMING

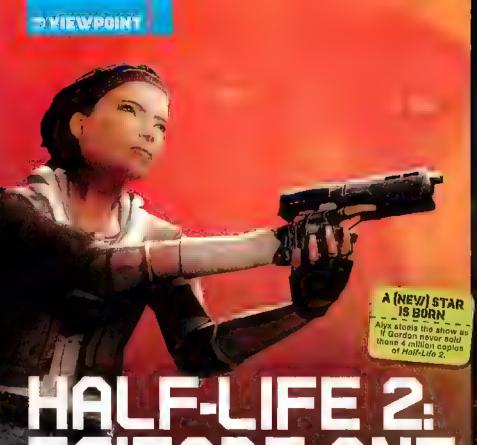
VERDICT

Killer.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	8/10
SAMESPOT	8.2/10
GAMESPY	-
IEM	8/10

BLOOD MONEY IS A GAME THAT PRACTICALLY BEGS YOU TO GO BACK AND REPLAY ITS IS MISSIONS.



LIFE 2: DDE ONE

A POTENTIAL ARE A SECTION OF THE MEAN OF THE REAL PROPERTY OF THE PARTY OF THE PART

Best \$20 date around



- Just exactly who has whom cornered here?



. The whole gang's here. Lot's play follow-the-Gurdon!



Ya getta leve a gal who's comfortable with a big gun.

THE FIRST EXTENSION OF HALF-LIFE 2 arrives after much anticipation of what it may: hold and an equal dose of hoopia over apisodic gaming. As the first in a planned series: of three such episodic follow-ups to HL2, Episode One picks up mere moments after the explosive cliff-hanger conclusion of HL2which makes a lot of sense for a series that's zero-for-two on satisfying andings. Contentwise, Episode One delivers the epilogue and wraps things up by following hero-types Alyx... Vance and Gordon Freeman as they escape from the chaos they unleashed in the Citadel and, ultimately, City 17.

A couple of recurring concerns surface as you's browse the discussion surrounding Episode One. The first involves the heavy recycling of content from the original game; white backtracking through a familiar progression of environments in your escape from City 17, you face (mostly) the same set of foes along the way. Aside from a slight twist on the headcrab zomble, most threats consist of the familiar Combine soldiers, manhacks, and antillons. As IGN reviewer Tom McNamara aptly summarizes "Episode One doesn't feel as fresh as a result, since it largely reuses previous content, and it.

doesn't advance the story as much as a fourhour experience should."

The game's second stumbling point: If comes to an end far too guickly. Experienced FPS gamers—those who've played HL2, for instance—might spend around five hours on their first run. Even for rookies, it's easily accomplished in a weekend skting; as GameSpot critic Jason Ocampo explains, "Before you. know it, you've escaped from City 17, the credits are rolling, and you're left wanting more." But I would go a step further: When I reached the end, I had a sense that I'd basi-ti cally treaded water to get to the real ending of HL2,...a notion I blame partly on the lack of what IGN's McNamera terms the "wow" factor, a deficit brought about by the combination of short length and reused content.

ALYX TO THE RESCUE

But Alyx Vance steals the spotlight as the star of the show. Solely from a gameplay perspective, her presence at your side through most of the game brings a new teamworkdynamic to working through the otherwise same old environments of City 17. But she's no mechanical drone—excellent voice work (i don't even hold it against her that she blurts: out "Oh, snap!" at one point) and naturally animated gestures give her a palpable personality. Your interactions with Alyx account for the most memorable moments in the game, action and all.

Not surprisingly, HL2's Source engine puts on a pretty show with its latest improvements, keeping good visual pace with recent videocard technology. The commentary mode from the Lost Coast demo level also returns, giving curious players a fascinating look behind the curtain, I enjoyed the insightful discussion about how much goes into every detail—even those we sail past for but a brief moment during a firefight—but I also felt a little like I was attending an academic lecture. Fans will revel in it, though, as they will in the game itself. It's more Half-Life, after all-and that's what really matters./ Garnett Lee:



AEBDIC I

With a single smile, Alyx makes up for a somewhat thinly stretched first episode.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK 8/10 **GAMESPOT** 7.8/10 GAMESPY 3.5/5 IBN 8.2/10

I HAD A SENSE THAT ID BASICALLY TREADED WATER TO GET TO THE REAL ENDING OF HALF-LIFE 2



ERECE ENCE

Somewhat original SiN



We complain about Emergence's lack of multiplayer, but Ritual is aliming to release a multiplayer add on in August. No mode detalls yet, but Ritual is "vary excited to get it out to the community."





 Kiler Miller mutanta? Throw your hands in the air?

Take sareful alm—head shets work host against these guys.

ARE GAMES ART?
They weren't in Duke Nukem and Doom's day. Men were men, women had pom-star proportions, and BFG didn't exactly stand for Bio-Force Gun. Today, developers slow down the pace to flaunt' graphics while wrangling with bigger questions like emotion and storytelling. Hence, SIN Episodes:

Emergence has an especially tough fight: The born-again FPS needs to stay true to its.

FPS needs to stay true to its: roots and remain palatable; enough to attract new gamers...while packing enough gameplay intothe first six-hour episode to justify the \$20 cost, Like a schizophrenic off meds, Emergence begins unbalanced. Two. early cringe-inducing scenes feature villainous sexpot Elexis Sincinire's digitized boobs practically stapping you in the face; from there, it shifts to a druggedup Col. John R. Blade sliently brooding through the entire. experience like Half-Life's Gordon Freeman, Isn't there some sort

of middle ground here? Half the

Now, his handlers simply bark

fun of the original game came from

hearing Blade crack wise while call-

ing shots for the HardCorps team.

exposition-laced orders: "Go in the building, John! You need to turn off the computer,
John! Don't eat that paste, John!" Emergence
chief designer Tom Mustalne explains, "Blade
doesn't have a voice, for story reasons...but
it's also been many years since FPS games
had a chatty main character." Expect Blade
to get more talkative in future installments.
For the moment, though, a builet is worth a
thousand words.

BRAINS OVER BRAWN

When it comes to action, Emergence chases the shooter dragon with a junkle's zeal—and the Dynamic Difficulty Adjustment (DDA) systern is the game's greatest strength. Tracking every facet of what you're doing (down to the number of footsteps taken) and adjusting difficulty on the fly, DDA showcases Emergence as more than a simple shooting gallery. Troops communicate with each other, pull back, and team up if you're chewing through a level. Hey, Valve? Take some notes before completing Half-Life 2: Episode Two, because Episode-One's pacing is, at times, pokey by comparison. Just don't fall into Emergence's trap of forcing players to quicksave and reload to deal with several cheap enemies-popping-out-ofnowhere moments.

At least enemies look good (if a little Half-Life-ish) while you're dying, thanks to a modded Source engine. Environmental details also show off a good deal of interactivity, but we wish the oh-so-in-vogue physics puzzles here weren't so amateurish—a propane tank, set by itself next to a precariously placed girder might as well have a blinking neon sign saying, "Shoot me!" interestingly, items you.

monkey with allegedly have repercussions in later episodes.

It's time for me to eat a little crow: I, along: with many critics, originally dinged Emergence for a content drought. When encountering multiple waves of the same armored. baddies in a short six-hour ride, you can't help but feel shortchanged. In retrospect, Emergence's five different enemy types count for more than the one new kamikaze headcrab zombie we got in Helf-Life 2: Episode One. However, Emergence's scant three firearms—a handgun, an assault rifle, and a shotgun—are the unbuttered toast of FPS games. Sure, the arsenal feels substantially meaty...but how about some original gear? According to Mustaine, "Future episodes will increase the total cun count. We also plan on episode-specific weapons, some that you will see in one episode, but never in another."

Who cares if Emergence is a by-the-numbers shooter? It's still a fun thrill ride on some base level. The designers just need to tinker with the narrative and refine some gameplay issues if they hope people will come back for more. That's one advantage of episodic games:

Maybe the next installment will fix everything.

/ Darren Gladstone

GAVING

VERDICT

What could've been a shaky shooting gallery makes for a decent start to the reborn series.

PEALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	7/10
GAMESPOT	7.3/1
GAINESPY	3/5
IGN	8/10

THE DYNAMIC DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENT SYSTEM IS THE GAME'S GREATEST STRENGTH.

ROGUE TROOPER

Once is more than enough



 Alrahips salled hoppers bring in reinforcements....



...Until you sabotage the landing pads by solving a "puzzle" that involves pressing the "E" key at the right place.

THE JOHN D.
ROCKEFELLER OF
GAMES BASED
ON COMICS

In 1999, Reque Trooper developer Reboillan bought the publisher of the Regue Trooper comics, 2000 AD...which probably made happling over the rights to make a Regue Trooper game much easier.

RESTAN REEO'S EJROGAMER.NET review of Rogue Trooper (Eides' third-person action shooter) is among the most charitable. But even he admits, "Whether you use the basic pistol, the machine gun, shotgun, mortar or beam rifle...clusters of enemies just fall like ninepins.... The sense of tanaion and achievement is just in a blizzard of fallen [enemies]."

But in the comments section following his raview, some? (yes, someone named "some?") replies, "I've been reading a few of the reviews" on Metacritic....and the one thing they do all agree on is that there is loads of replay value because you can use the abilities to tackle situations in a lot of different and interesting ways."

Leaving aside the point that this is patently untrue—most reviews decry Rogue Trooper's lack of replay value—let's give this a shot: I'll run through the game's Nu Paree level a few times, trying out different approaches. I chose that level because it's actually cool in a Blade-Runner-on-an-engine-that-can-be-easily-ported-to-multiple-platforms-especially-the-PS2 kind of way. Let's see thow, it turns out.

TOURING NU PAREE

The first time through, I just run-and-gun

it—pretty standard stuff. On my second trip, I limit myself to grenades. Rogue Trooper has four grenade types: standard frag grenades, sticky bombs that conveniently veer toward their targets, area-effect incendiary grenades, and scrambler grenades. You can call up a display that shows you the exact arc of your toss, making it easy to chuck a grenade just where you want it. Nu Pares is still pretty easy, even though I have no way to kill snipers.

I try the stealth approach for my third run. This is dead simple if you hang back and snipe with the silencer; it helps that patrol cycles don't get disrupted too much when ensure social eague mysteriously collapse. Hand-to-hand kills are too tedious to set up, and the salvage bonus isn't worth it.

B00000000RING

Bored out of my skull by the fourth trip, I decide I'll use only the mortar. Whenever it runs out of amme, I just make more—which is what you can do with the salvage parts lifted off of dead bodies. Rogue Trooper's economy booms; ammunition, grenades, and healing are plentiful and dirticheap. All goes well, so on my fifth time through, I decide to do it without making any medkits. By this point, I'm so familiar with the level that it's easy to evoid taking damage. In fact, I can prob-

ably play it with my eyes closed by now.

For my sixth runthrough, I decide to use only the beam weapon. About halfway into the level, I just give up. What am I trying to prove? Very little changes based on whatever weapons I use or whatever limits I put on myself. The game features plenty of flexibility for how you kill the bad guys, but it offers no compelling reason for you to employ any elaborate methods. One way is as good as any other, and they're all equally available, given that you can buy whatever you want with salvage items. It's hardly a substitute for replay value.

If you take a game that's composed entirely of canned set pieces—say, Rogue Trooper—and play it over and over and over, you're going to make yourself hate it. I liked it only mildly enough the first time. So it just goes to show that in a game this thin, familiarity breeds contempt./Tom Chick

GAVING

VERDICT

A thin action-shooter with almost no replayability.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK GRMESPOT GRMESPY 6/10 6.7/10

8/10

ONE WAY IS AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER, AND THEY'RE ALL EQUALLY AVAILABLE.

VAPORY/AREI

BACK WHEN I WROTE THE INSIDE

Wargaming column for CGW about five years ago, I got the chance to try out a beta PC version of World in Flames, the popular strategic-level World War II game from Australian Design Group. In my column, dated April 2001, the game's coding was allegedly '95-percent done." Today, the game is under development by a different team—still unfinished.

Vaporware clouds the war-gaming genre.
Unsurprising, since so many projects amount to one-man shows, powered by enthusiasm, that peter out when life intrudes. A few months ago, I wrote about JASL, a project to bring Advanced Squad Leader to the PC. The project's page still features a flashing "new!" icon for the latest version...dated November 2004 (although I understand work continues and further versions have been made available for download).

This hobby is all about overreaching. How many cardboard war games did we buy just because they were big and cool? Evon though we couldn't imagine finishing them, something

LITHUANIA LITHUA

 World in Flames, "95-percent done" as of April 2001, We're still walting.

about them fired up the imagination. It's the same impulse that gave birth to the ultimate vaporware war game: Road to Moscow, for which Arsenal Publishing inked a publishing deal in February 1996. That's even worse than Duke Nukem Forever's track record.

As I scroll through forum after forum for unreleased war games, I wonder how much of this is actually essential for the hobby. For every abandoned project, another promising game goes into development. After the disappointing *Crown of Glory* last summer, many stalwarts hung their hopes on *Empires in Arms*—the game about which developer Marshall Ellis posted on the game's official forum, "We've still got some work to do, but I'm still hopeful to be finished in the next month or two!"

That was in August of last year. No matter how often our hearts get broken, we still dream./Bruce Geryk



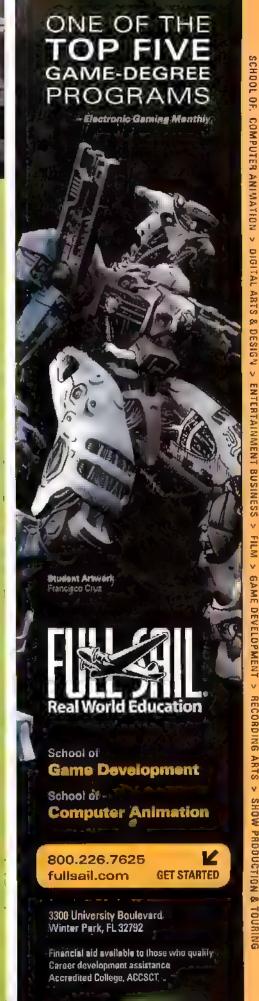
Longlime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk can probably kick your ass at any board game,... any day of the week.



Empires in Arms, said last year to ship "in the next month or two." We're still waiting.



Road to Moscow, Initially announced in 1996. We're still waiting.







Demon or misunderstood centus? Who cares?! Is it my turn yet?



Attack a heat and you'll angage in combatmen a boat!

GET THE PATCH NOW

The Horoes VVI.1 patch
(9 available new at
FileFront.com, Don't play
without (i)

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V

We're one Patch of Might & Magic away...

THAT SLIGHTLY NASAL WHOOSHING. sound you hear is the collective sigh of relief coming from fantasy-strategy geeks everywhere, Hallelujah! Heroes of Might & Magic V does not suck! New developer Nival Interactive (makers of the Silent-Storm games) and publisher Ublsoft accomplished a miracle with this formerly dead turn-based strategy series: They've resurrected it, made it all pretty with a new 3D: engine, and almost completely recaptured the gameplay that made the first games so addictive. The only bummer? It didn't become worthy of this kind of praise until the release of a significant patch several weeks after the game shipped.

UST ONE MORE TURN

The core of Heroes V remains unchanged from previous versions: a yummy mix of map exploration, resource-gathering, city-building, and tactical turn-based combat, set against a high-fantasy backdrop. The Heroes series always nalled this balance just right, and Nival doesn't mess with success, thankfully, always giving you plenty to do and compelling you to take "just one more turn."

The move to a 3D engine—despite some horrendous prepatch slowdowns—mostly succeeds, with all the familiar creatures, objects, and environments brought vividly to life on both the adventure maps and combat screens. Combat is wonderfully animated, with the camera swooping in at key mo-

ments when creatures clash. The beautiful adventure maps occasionally get tough to navigate, with environments so dense that you often end up missing key items, which forces you to waste turns backtracking to pick them up.

More problematic is the single-player campaign itself, which comprises the bulk of your play experience... and, right out of the box, is too hard, too inconsistent, and too imbalanced from mission to mission. An endless "tutorial" goes on about four missions too long—after that, though, the game gets nearly impossible, even at the "normal" difficulty setting. Even on the best of the missions, the game is marchlessly stingy about providing players with enough resources...and then stacks the deck further with ridiculously tough A.I. enemies.

Adding insuit to Injury, the game doesn't give you much to do beyond the campaign. Heroes V ships with a measty six skirmish maps and no map editor. Worse, the skirmish maps themselves are "story-based," meaning you're forced to play as a certain faction and complete certain goals, rather than allowed to choose your own sandbox-atyle playing conditions. Given that the Heroes series traditionally thrived on skirmish maps—whether user-created or from developers—it's a shockingly egregious oversight.

Finally, a ton of inexcusable bugs plague: Heroes V's retail release, including an initiative bar that misreports the number of units left in creature stacks during combat, a miscounting of units after battles, random desktop crashes, and almost completely broken multiplayer.

HOSETPHETEN MEN

So while CGW contributor Matt Peckham's IUP.com review acore (5 out of 10) seems! overly harsh to some, I think it was the right call for the game that shipped. With the v1.1 patch, some utterly essential fixes bumped up the game's quality tremendously. In addition to fixing the worst of the bugs-that is, the game doesn't crash anymore, the inbattle tallies are now correct, and the multiplayer is playable—Nival mercifully tweaked some of the missions and added an "easy" made to the campaign. We still don't get a map editor or new skirmish maps, though... so once you do finish the campaign, you're pretty much done. Which sucks. So let's hope Nival gets that stuff out soon-then we'll be able to rave about Heroes V with no reservations whatspeyer Jeff Green

GAIVIING

VERDICT

One more patch (and one map editor) away from greatness...but still a welcome return for an old strategy favorite.

REALITY CHECK

THE CASE OF THE PERSON AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON ADDRESS OF THE PERSON AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON ADDRESS OF THE PERSON AND ADDRESS OF THE PERSON ADDRESS OF THE PERS	
IUP NETWORK	5/10
ERMESPOT	8.2/10
PAMERINA	3.5/5
IGN	7.8/10

HALLELUTAHI HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V DOES NOT SUCKI

FINAL FANTASY XI. TREASURES OF AHT URHGAN

BETTER THE DEVII. YOU KNOW...

Over half a million North American aubscribers would rather with with FFXFs doep gameplay than patrunks more populated pastures like World of WarCraft

Floomoth



Even with all the unbalanced additions, in grouping it still the fastest way to pain XP.



FINAL FANTASY XI, AS A SERIES branches out in an arc not disbranches out in an arc not disbranches out in an arc not disbranches out in a partial displayed in a series of the MMORPG ripe for tweaking, patching, and finessing. The first expan-

sion, Alise of the Zilart (included as part of FFXI's North American debut), let players now comfortable with the early-game skills ply their trade in whole new regions and environments while offering new jobs to master. The follow-up, Chains of Promathia, is where FFXI went all gothlo teen anget—difficult and frustrating, but that's a part of growing up. Treasures of Ahit Uringan, at long last, thrusts FFXI into full adult-hood for its fourth (and possibly final) chapter.

While FFXI is, in general, much less forgiving than a game like World of WarCraft, sustained play teaches players the ins and outs of the game's battle system and, in turn, reveals a greater payoff for skilled, cooperative play with one's party members. It's difficult at first, and the true beauty of the game manifests later rather than sooner—in the high-level, endgame areas where players battle the gods. This remains so in Treasures, and gamers can either accept this or not.

The installation process, layers of menus, and old-fashioned experience-point grind clearly vexed GameSpot's reviewer, who seems to think that the game's recent Xbox 360 port holds appeal only for new users, failing to realize that the conversion imparts a haven for players whose PlayStation 2s had dried up (or who just wanted

the power of PC-quality graphics at a console price). It's too bad many people won't realize that the process of leveling up is aided by Treasures new areas, where low-HP mobs and experience enhancing items and job abilities expedite the grind to the game's level-75 cap.

New measter classes, such as this massive ill, provide more variety in combat.

GameSpy, on the other hand, knows the game's inner workings and battle system much better, pointing out that—despite vague quest! details that send players filipping through online. FAQs—FFXI features an evolved communication system, instillously deep crafting mechanics, and a mentor system designed to help veterans assist newcomers to the game.

A BETTER MOUSETRAP

The big question, though: Does Treasures add to the legacy...or detract from it in the way that the previous expansion, Chains of Promethia, did? While many zealots argue that Promethie's story line made that expansion worthwhile, its sheer difficulty and lowincentive made for a game that catered to the hardcore—in theory, shrinking FFXI's appeals and sending droves of players to games like WOW and Gulld Wars. Treasures puts the brakes on this decline, with three new job classes (Blue Mage, Corselr, and Puppetmaster) that—while currently unbalanced and overpowered—introduce some cool new party-configuration possibilities. The basic game mechanics remain the same, crossing the traditional turn-based combat of the Final Fantasy series with the real-time involvement of an action-RPG. Once you engage an anamy, a palette of options appears, offering you the chance to cast spells, use special attacks, and activate job-specific abilities.

One particularly useful new feature, Assault—a mode that allows small parties to engage in different miniralds for a short period of time—offers incentives like armor, weapons and fame within the game. The other major addition, Besieged, promises massive enemy raids on player towns...but it's currently broken due to too many players and enemies being shoehorned into one small, instanced area.

The bottom line: People will either appreciate the depth of FFXI despite some of the above-mentioned hurdles, or they'll move on to less-demanding MMOs. Treasures' swanky. Arabian-themed graphical style still doesn't hold a candle to those of games like Oblivion, but the organic environments and more realistically proportioned characters ensure that FFXI continues to age better than many of its competitors. James Mielke

GAVING

VERDICT

Less forgiving than World of WarCraft and lacking the tech innovations of Guild Wars, FFXI stands on the merits of its great controls, constant improvements, and mind-numbing depth.

REALITY CHECK

REALITY CHECK	
IUP NETWORK	9/10
GAMESPOT	6/10
GAMESPY	3/5
IGN	6,9/10

THE TRUE BEAUTY OF THE GAME
MANIFESTS LATER RATHER THAN SOONER:





JUNE 14, 2006: "YOU HAVE PLAYED this character for 172 hours, 27 minutes over the past 39 days." If that isn't a glowing endorsement of how much I enjoy Guild Wars Factions, the first stand-alone expansion to

developer ArenaNet's free-to-play action-MMORPG, then Ldon't know what is.

Factions retains the sort of gameplay you'd expect in a Guild Wars game (or most any fantasy MMORPG, for that matter): Kill monsters, gain experience, earn new skills, and battle it out in player-versus-player arena combat. The ebx core professions introduced in the original game thenceforth referred to as Guild Wars Prophecies); each gain numerous combat options, but the lion's share of the attention goes to Factions' two new professions: The assessin and the ritualist.

PUTTING THE ASS IN ASSASSIN

Anyone who played Factions during its first weeks no doubt experienced the glut of dagger-wielding assassin characters—usually manned by players attempting to employ the class as a frontline fighter instead of as the calculating hit-and-run damage-dealer it's meant to be. The assassin really shines in the hands of a capable player who knows how to take advantage of its high-damage attack chains, but utilimately lacks the raw versatility of core professions such as the ranger and mesmer. Conversely, the creepy, shamanlike ritualist goes for a jack-of-all-trades support role and fails on all fronts. This professions muddled blend of frealing spells and

spirit minions make it very micromanagementintensive, and essentially demands twice the work to achieve half the results of, say, a dedicated monk or necromancer.

The campaign itself makes up for the new professions' shortcomings: Factions introduces Canthe, a land with an exotic Asian motif and a: much better cadence than that of the comparatively uneven Prophecies. You can actually hit the game's 20-level cap before leaving the lutorial Island, making Factions the full realization of ArenaNet's antigrind mantra. This energetic pacing persists throughout the 13-mission story line, and while you do have to slog through some mazelike adventure areas ("It's easy to get lost, and have to backtrack ridiculous distances," URcom reviewer Joet Durham Jr. rightly points out), most of Factions' environments trump Prophecies' often imitating level design. The new tiered mission acoring system (you earn rewards) based on time and performance) improves on Prophecies' difficult bonus objectives, and multiple groups can compete for ranked scores: in certain challenge scenarios...

GOT FACTION?

Player-versus-environment and player-versusplayer gameplay aspects were largely split in *Prophecies*, but *Factions* unifies the two camps, pitting player guild alliances against one another for control of 18 different contested outposts throughout Cantha. Victories yield faction points, which your alliance can collectively exchange for a controlling interest in one of the contested outposts—and access to perks such as elite mission areas.

It's an interesting and competitive system—but, as GameSpy reviewer Miguel Lopez explains, it caters toward the hardcore. "Ingenious indeed," he writes, "but exclusionary to the average player who can't get into one of the big guide." Casual players might instead take advantage of the new guild-scrimmage mode, though these battles could use something beyond the lone capture—the-fing mode currently offered (a simple 5-on-5 knock-down, drag-out battle might be fun).

But now I'm just nitpicking—the great thing about Factions is that it offers something for everyone, rewarding skill and ingenuity rather than time served, catering to a variety of play styles, and opening a slew of options that (new professions aside) easily outshine Prophecies. Says 1UP.com's Durham: "Whether you want to gather with a few friends or start a measive guild, whether you'd care to play through the adventure or take on the world, Guild Wars Factions has something for you." Believe it. Pyan Scott

GAVING

VERDICT

Indisputably the best entry point for Guild Wars newcomers—and one great reason for existing players to stay on board.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK GAMESPOT GAMESPY

9/10 8.5/10 4.5/5

8.5/10

THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF MAKES UP FOR THE NEW PROFESSIONS SHORTCOMINGS.

CRISIS ON INFINITE SERVERS

A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD OF AN MMORPG ADDICT

ROLLIN' OUT

WHILE I SPENT THE LAST MONTH trying to get up to speed on Guild Wars and its new assessin class (after spending a decent chunk of time away from the game), I got sidetracked by another recent NCsoft title—one that I was curious about, but not particularly compelled to play: Auto Asseur, the week-a-licious new Twisted Mella-meets-MMO postapossiptic game that breaks the MMORPG genre's ubiquitous DED mold. EA's Motor City Online attempted the "oer-PG" thing a few years backwith dissatrous results, and Pm hoping Auto Asseuti doesn't surier the same fate.

And depending on how you look stait, why should lift AA has a lot going for its it's good-cokin, it's easy to pick up and play (picture) World or WarGran, except with care), and the (un. Plus, it's published by NGsoft, the MMO expert, so I expect much better support than what EA coughed up for MGO. The readisparity between something like WOW and AA, though, letter population, in WOW—which naturally enjoys the advantage of a loyal, built-in following—we see new earvers pop up all the time, thenics to the instant number of players. But AA forges a brand-new IP, a risk jector player, whether the populations that is servers (as of this writing in June), maintain.

In ope that more people give AA a spin (not pun intended) and find out what a cool game it is (check this month's review on page 55 to (indicat what i mean), as I can only imagine what a world full of cars, trucks, and dune-buggles would be like if it were buzzing with enthusiastic people. I bet the FVP zones would pook pretty hard, with rival factions of humans, blomeks, and mutants as blasting each other to bits. With no death penalties in the game. FVP is really a paintess endeavor, and it seems like the gun-shy players out there would find more reason to participate when they're roking around in monster cars with big guns.

TRAVELING THE RUAD TO RUIN

As you might expect, you can equip your no with better gear as you level up—but at the expense of meaningful characterization. Sure each of AA's three races gets a representative face," but players get no specific NPC evaters to rely behind. You've got a woman, a woman with green-eyes, and a dude who looks like he walked off the set of Mad Max. Wouldn'll the game-buying public warms to the concept quicker if Ab presented more actual characters instead of just big metal cars? You do get to create a humanoid avatar to drive your cal...but the game doesn't exploit this element to its fullest, and you generally just don't get a lot of options here.

If people don't "get is," they're not going to pick up the game. Since I have the luxury of

trying out these games shead of time, I know that AA is good times, but it's a lot more difficult for the average consumer to see that from the outside. For someone to even give this game a shot, they have to pick it up and contemplate paying a monthly fee. "It is worth the trouble of downloading and installing?" they's wonder, and, unike the typical fantasy MMO, it's not as clear-out a docision. Somewort of endearing characterization might lure a lew more people in; maybe, as a start, NCsofl could put a 3D head in the upper-right-

hand corner of the screen that reacts to the carnage. And possibly the avater of someone you're targeting in PVP play, so you can actually see who you're attacking. Adding a little-more personality to the game would make things a little more...well, personal. And that's a good start right there. (James Melke)



1UP.com executive editor James Mielke spends every lota of his free time playing online games. He needs help—badly.

TO LEAR SELECTION THE MEASURE OF THE MEANING OF THE



Nearly every mission in Auto Assault





WELCOME TO THE WASTELAND OF Auto Assault—a blasted, abandoned atretch of highway, barren of life but for the occasional ione survivor struggling vainly, to hang on. Sadly, we're not talking about AA's satting; the game Itself amounts to an online no-man's-land, situated somewhere in the flyover country between MMORPGs and action games. It's worth visiting just to say that you've been there...but apparently not the best place to hang around if you want meaningful human interaction in your games.

Just why the hell is that? Most reviews have been giving it noncommittel scores (we're talking the ubiquitous 7-out-of-10s) without a lot of agreement about why, while alternately praising, and condemning the game's departures from MMO conventions. GameSpot's Jeff Gerstmann puts the game's lack of a death penalty in the list of bad things because, "you never really feel any tension from the battles," while IGN's Tom McNamara says, "You may believe that death penalties are 'meaningful' and make the game more 'challenging.' I prefer not to be punished for trying to 'have some fun."

CRUISE CONTROL

The MMO highway?

Other reviews hall the game's "solo-ablity" as either refreshing or self-defeating...and a surprising number of players actually went a game they can play with one frontal lobe tied behind their back. "I like to be able to play a game where I can accomplish things while still doing one or two other things. Such as when I raid on the weekends—I can usually make dinner white I'm doing it," writes flude on the official Auto Assault forums. Depending on whom you ask, the game either doesn't behave enough like a straight-up action title; either it's too different, not different enough, or just different in the wrong ways.

Not that the game is without issues everyone can agree on—mostly the cloud of minor bugs that began swarming the title during beta. One universal acknowledgement knocks AA's baffling lack of an auction house, effectively throttling the in-game economy. A potentially deep crafting system in there somewhere, too...but without other players or an easy means of trading with

them, you just don't have much justification for learning its intricacles.

But players don't often mention any of these flaws when they bother to say why they're quitting. Frustration-riddled posts line the game's official forums, such as "I love this game, but one of the main things that draws me to any MMO is the fact that there are people to Interact with," and "I've already cut my six-month subscription down to three, and the clock is ticking each day I log on, and nobody else is playing. I don't play MMOs to solo in an environment devoid of other players." So nobody wants to play because nobody else is playing it's a self-defeating cycle—one that will probably run the game over and leave it for dead on the side of the road.

LOST HIGHWAY

Even with a critical, self-sustaining mass of players, you wouldn't have much reason to actually play AA with other people. Grouping isn't actively discouraged, but in all but a few cases, it's completely unnecessary...compounded by AA's aforementioned auction-house-lacking



gameplay (which renders the player economy stillborn). The only real player interaction happens through optional PVP, itself relegated to arena matches and a single high-level zone for the details of another player's gear, removing the vital elements of prestige and competitiveness. Taken together, these factors essentially translate AA into a decent single-player game with a monthly fee.

Sadly, consolidating the game's underpopulated servers would be less a solution and more an embarrassing admission of defeat. "Nothing says "We falled—our population sucks" more than a server shutdown.... They might as well pull the plug on all the servers after that," writes Reasan on the AA forums if might mean that (for a while, at least) we wouldn't have to drive across the antire world without encountering another player...but put-

ting more people in the same place without giving them a reason to actually play together, hardly solves the problem. Most MMO players group out of necessity; otherwise, they're just getting in each other's way and competing for the same resources.

At this point, we have no idea how to save the game, short of a complete overhaul. Either retooling all of the classes to make them more interdependent or making it an entirely instanced game and converting it to a free *Guild Wars*-like model might help. The second option is probably technically impossible; the first, on the other hand, would likely only piss off a small core of diehards (unless we're talking a full *Ster Wars Galaxies*-style relaunch). But AA already went through one rebuild midway through its beta; as much as we like the game, we'd be shocked if it stuck around long enough for a second overhaul. Scott Sharkey,



VERDICT

We've still got a foot on the gas pedal we only wish it wasn't such a lonely trip.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	8/10
5AMESAOT	7.2/10
GAMESPY	3.5/5
IGN	7.5/10

A DECENT SINGLE-PLAYER GAME WITH A MONTHLY FEE



COMIC BOOKS CAN BE ASTOUNDINGLY? complex. To paraphrase one of the medium's celebrated artists, each panel's a shot in time daringly plucked from a potential 🖥 thousand. And the images? Abstractions of subject focusing our attention on its most: memorable elements: eyes on a face, spotson a cow, branches on a tree, zits on a-you? get the picture. Contemporary adventure games work similarly, but instead of plotures? they parse activities, shuffling you through lavishly detailed locales while limiting rather profoundly what you can do...focusing your "logic lens," in other words. You may be standing just outside the world's frillest bedroom with minutiae everywhere, but your actions are limited to: enter bedroom, open desk drawer, take needle and thread, thread needle, use on ripped dress in inventory, and presto-you're ready for the ball, Cinderella.

But white clever puzzling rules, rambling activities are chores. I hate to bellyache, but point-and-guess exploration hit conceptual high water with King's Guest two decades ago. Before you grumble "great, adventure troll," I'm not—honest to Grim Fandango. From Colossal Cave to The Longest Journey, It'e because I love a good rip as much as you do that I'm so blah about adventure games that take great story concepts and muzzle them with moth-saten mechanics...games like Benoît Sokal's Paradise.

It's the sort of release that gets a "from the award-winning game creator slapped above Sokal's name on the box, implying wa're in capable hands. But, no, Paradise is like ay canticle for everything that stubbornly blad this genre into the bargain bin. Flush with nonseguiturs, ite baffling puzzles pivot on bumbling antics. Half the game equals swishing the mouse around picturesque 2D renders, hunting for hot spots in search of improbable doodads. then wandering to and fro hoping you have the right stuff to capriciously trigger a cut-scene or conversation topic. It gives new significance, to the notion of "accidental tourist." Cafelix, a poster on the game's official message board, rightly grouses: "Spanding all of my time scanning each scene with the cursor to find invisible click-spots is not my idea of a game.

And, unlike that of Sokal's Syberie, the plot in Paradise plods at best. In the fictional African country of Maurania, you play the supposedly estranged daughter of the nation's pitiless dictator, who sends for you in hope of railying the country to his cause with new blood. But your plane's shot down en route—and then you awaken, trapped in a palace harem with no memory of your identity (thank you, O wise and powerful amnesiac piot device). The highlight of the first several hours? Making perfums. A few hours later? Finding parts for a truck. And just when you think it can't possibly get dulier.

(or dumber), it does, with a few silly run-andjump 3D minigames involving a panther. They're buggy, ugly as sin, and should have hit the cutting room floor.

Speaking of looks, you'd be hard-pressed to carp about Sokal's beautiful art (the box credits all 350 environments as "personally created" by him) if it weren't for the horrid 800x800 resolution lock. Imagine a Da Vinci wrapped in filmy plastic, and you have a sense of how disappointingly opaque the artey locales took. GameSpot reviewer Greg Mueller (who scored the game a merciful 5.8 out of 10) pretty much nails it: "The backgrounds look nice, and the story does manage to get slightly interesting toward the end, but the game requires a substantial amount of work without much reward."

The skeleton of a decent game's here—mostly in Sokal's art—but, as with Lost's mysterious numbers or Battlestar Galactica's quest for Earth, if you want us to play, you'd better be able to pay up...and Paradise's plot and puzzies don't. Not by a long shot./ Matt Peckham

GANING

VERDICT

Illogical puzzles disengaged from a plodding plot; attractive visuals botched by fuzzy 2D renders.

LIKE A CANTICLE FOR EVERYTHING THAT STUBBORNLY BLED THIS GENRE INTO THE BARGAIN BIN.

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	4/10
GAMESPOT	5.8/10
GAMESPY	
1000	6.2/10



PHAT CASH

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIGNAIREY
(SK, maybe—at best—probably a nundredaire; A thousandaire if you're really lucky. Whatever—it's hard to best havings a chance at winning cash for playing softaire or simple word games. That's part of the appeal of Glub Pogo, a casual-gaming site that owers something more than high scores and bersonel satisfaction.

personal satisfaction

At \$35 annually (or \$5 on a morthly basis), Glub
Pogo costs more than most casual games, but
you're spared pop-up ads and given the opportunity to win tangible prizes. You won't find
inviting superhandors among the 75-plus
games here, but then again; Afficiaent bundled
\$56/fz/re with Windows for a good reason—It can
be stupicly addictive. More so with Club Pogo's
World Glass Solitairs, which adds some strategic
twists. And while GWERTY's a simple crossword
pares, it's hard to best the satisfaction you get
from bounding another player online.

join troung another player online.

As fun as the games are (and with %2/million subscribersin/two years—each sveraging 14 hours per week—they'd beffer be fun), the rewards provide the real hook. Winstokens, which are tradable for things such as

avatar upgrades, special bedges, and entries into dally, weekly, and monthly cash-prize drawings. Topping it alliest a prize apinne that gives game winners a chance to sport up to \$4,999. That's a pretty nice carrot to dangle in wort of some Java games.

STAY ON TARGET!

Even if you don't want to join Club Pogo.

You owe it to yoursell to download Allen Sters
from the core Pogo alte, pogo.com-This
top-down shooter follows in the Galega mold.

Except it's stot pretter—and tougher, each
of the game's 12 levels packs an unholy
number of enemies and obstacles to destroy
orlavoid) before a face-off against a massiva
bass. Allen Stars doesn't reinvent the wheelout it does do that wheel in chocolateland
unicome and happy laughing babies, making
it pretty much imesisticle. Di course, plenty
or power-ups mut actues yoring a strategic
adge to the action help make it fun, too. It's a
pargent at just 520. Hobert Coffe)



CGW alum Robert Coffey blames his inability to get anything done on "column research," He's really just playing word games online.







the edds in your favor.



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WHEN UBISOFT UNCEREMONIOUSLY punted the PC version of Ghost Recon 2 in the spring of last year, armchair spec-ops guys around the world issued a collective "WTF?". Ubisoft's justification was matter-of-fact: "With the launch of Ghost Recon 3 planned for winter 2005, significant human resources were needed to ensure the quality of the future installment of the series, thus potentially jeopardizing the quality of either Ghost Recon 2 PC or Ghost Recon 3." Translated into non-corp-speak: "Why sink money into a PC-only version of the game when we can spend it on the more lucrative console market instead?"

But...but...we PC gamers—the few, the proud, the hardcore-enough-to-wear-fa-tigues-to-an-online-match—surely we deserve the best in next-gen tactical shooter development! We certainly appreciate it more

than some 11-year-old with an Xbox 360 who what never been through SEAL training (or at least, you know, watched a three-part special about it on the Military Channel) like we have...

Now, one year after that angry, slightly pathetic time, Ubisoft wants to recapture the PC market with Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, starting with a smart strategic decision: Despite the fact that GRAW appears on the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and Xbox 360, developer GRIN offers significantly different versions for each system. And I can say, without reservation, that the PC version is the definitive one, being the largest, and most factically oriented. On the other hand, it's also the most aggravating, primarily because of poor execution, and over-the-top system requirements.

BRING OUT THE GIMP

The action in GRAW goes down in a near-

future Mexico City, where the leaders of the three major North American countries (together for a joint summit) come under attack from a rebel faction of the Mexican army. The wussy-ass Canadian PM is, of course, killed right off the bat...so it's up to U.S. Special Forces to save the two presidents who were men enough to stay alive. And while the PC and console versions share the same story, they don'tshare the same play style. As Patrick Joynt says in his 1UR.com review, "the PC version focuses 100 percent on bringing the series. back to the tactical-shooter audience." You command a squad of three (essentially: nameless and faceless) guys, either via a real-time satellite map or with quick orders issued directly from the HUD.

Now, I use the term "command" locally The interface is streamlined to very simple point-and-click options—great if you could



LACK OF BASIC A.I. FUNCTIONALITY ADDS NO MORE TENSION TO A GAME THAN FORGOING A CALCULATOR ADDS TENSION TO A MATH PROBLEM.



Issue general orders and count on your A.i. teammates to take it from there. But GRAW's A.I. won't take anything except a dump on your best-laid plans. Set up one of your guys at a defliade, and you can bet he'll end up shot in the ass, watching the wrong angle. Worse, teammates never move or displace on their own, even in the face of extreme threats such as enemy armor. Since your men aren't particularly good at taking cover either, this means they're constantly getting turned into extrachunky Ragu.

Micromanagement offers a potential remedy, as Joynt points out; "You can go into the tactical map and...tell your squadmates...which direction to face and how far away to focus." But while this meticulous. approach works when you have time to set? up, it's hardly practical when you're under fire—which is often the case, since the PC version features a very high number of enemies. I don't agree with the argument that the necessity for constant micromanagement increases suspense or enjoyment (in a GRAW or other any tactical shooter). Lack? of basic A.I. functionality adds no more. tension to a game than forgoing a calculator adds tension to a math problem; it's just

doing something the hard way for its own sake. On Ublacit's official forum, several posters have brought up the marked difference between GRAW's A.I. and that of another squad-based Ublacit series: Brothers in Arms. One entry puts it pointedly: "GRIN could learn a lot from Gearbox [developer of the BIA series]."

THE BOYALE WITH CHEESE

Another complaint about GRAW PC, both on the forums and in professional reviews: The game's system requirements reach ... beyond the capabilities of most current gen machines. To get anything resembling: a pleasing Visual experience, you need a mammoth GPU, as any videocard sans: 512MB of VRAM isn't even allowed to set the detail to High. An AGEIA physics card (GRAW is the first game to support such hardware) adds nominal PhysX features to the game, but even that doesn't do much for the performance. Even on a juggernaut rig, the game suffers serious framerate issues during large firefights and takes longer to load a mission than our commander-inchief takes to say "prestidigitation." Since saving is checkpoint-only (not everything)

was changed from the console version, apparently), and since your A.I. buddles go down more often than a glass-jawed fighter, prepare to stare at the loading screen for a loocooooong time.

As much praise and hype as GRAW PC received—and as gratified as I am that Ubisoft went the extra mile to craft a unique PC version—it could've turned out better. Sure, it has its strengths; huge, wide-open maps, solid multiplayer (especially co-op), great graphics, and a good story. But, taken with its many weaknesses (including some annoying bugs), I don't see how GRAW rates better than a fairly good tactical shooter—one that most PC users can't even run. Eric Heigher

GAVING

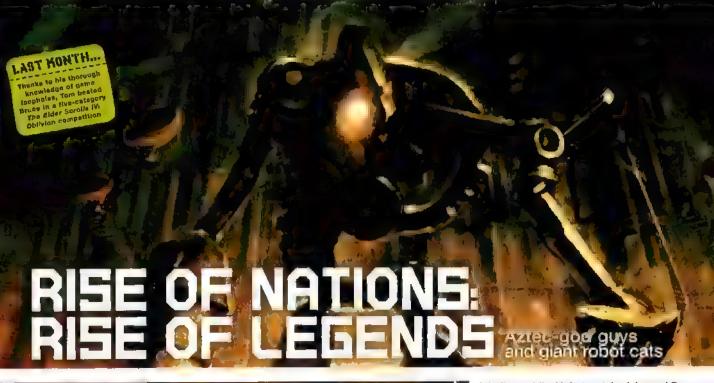
VERDICT

I'd like to buy two vowels: "A" and "I."

REALITY CHECK

IUP NETWORK	9/10
BAMESPOT	7.8/10
BAMEBAY	3.5/5
IGN	8.1/10

ICM vs. BRUCE



PUBLISHER Microsoft PAYRICHER: Big Hugo Games AWALABILITY Retail lies GENTS: Real-time strategy
BERT MAYNOL Teen PÉQUAED: 1.4GHz GPU, 256MB RAM, 4.8GB hard drive eases
PEQUAMENDED: 2GHz GPU, 7GB RAM, 125MD videocard, internet connection MUTPH AFTE 2-8 players

of Tom vs. Bruce is special, because for absolutely no extra charge, you get a long, involved backstory. It starts with Tom's glee at the release of *Rise of Legends*, progresses through various in-person thrashings when we played during last May's E3 Expo, and continues with loss after online loss by me...at which point I told Tom we were going to have to play *Lego Star Wars* instead. Somewhere in there, we decided it might be more interesting to have us both on the same team. So we played a 3-on-3 game with some people from Tom's website, Quarter for three com. And now I'm writing fan fiction about it.

TOM: It's really the only way. Rise of Legends is a genre work's delight, which means I'm pretty decent at it, and Bruce will forever be hopeless. If you don't believe me, have a look at QuarterToThree com, where you'll find an article in which Bruce explains that his only frame of context for this brilliant RTS is some weird board game about building a French castle. I am not making this up.

BRUCE: I'm playing the Alin, because their Arabian Nights backstory is the easiest for me to understand. I don't even want to start with the Renaissance robots or space Aztecs. You have to build a whole sequence of stuff, including the sand spire that upgrades your mines. But that costs money, so you need to make merchant districts. But that costs minerals, so you have to build miners. But that costs manpower, so you just collectivize the Donbass. If anyone gets that joke, you make sure and let me know.

TOM: Let me know as well.

BRUCE: My understanding is that we're automatically going to win, because Tom is on our side. This should be easy.

TOM: I'm playing the Cuoti in this game. The guy on the other team who really knows what he's doing is John, also Cuoti. His teammates Lee (playing the Vinci) and Dan (playing the Cuoti) slightly know what they're doing Rounding out the 3-on-3 on our side is Mike (playing the Alin)...who also slightly knows what he's doing As soon as the game starts, I tell everyone on our team that we want to keep the pressure on John. In order to help them remember this, I simply refer to John as "Blue," which is what you do in an RTS when everyone's too busy to remember who's playing what color.

The map is Condottier Outlands, in which we all start along an outer ring of cities. Toward the middle of the map lies an inner ring of cities among rich Timonium deposits. The trick is to secure your flanks and push

into the middle. Unfortunately, John and Bruce start next to each other, making the security of our left flank somewhat...well, questionable.

BRUCE: Being next to Brue is like being France right next to Germany. I just bought the neutral city that's sitting right between us. I hope that doesn't become a point of diplomatic contention. Buying a city costs money, but it gets you that city's army, which I guess makes up for some of the money. One of you eggheads can figure out the complex economic calculus that accounts for time, minerals spent on repairs, and extra military units.

Now I'm massing a big army next to a second neutral city, which we'll just call Luxembourg. And, holy crap—John is already attacking Luxembourg! Get away, dammit! I'll just have to attack him while he's fighting the neutral dudes.



 XiI, the giant robot cat, is the here of choice for half of the players.

TWO GAMERS ENTER, ONE GAMER WINS



Tom Chick

In addition to being one of the videogame industry's most prolific freelance journalists, Tomalso runs the popular website. Quarter ToThree pom.



Bruce Geryk

Longlime CGW contributor Bruce Geryk has witten about videogames for over 20 years; he loves war games like most people love oxygen.



 Lee's Glacomo tries to drive Tom and Bruce back, but to no avail.

TOM: I was pushing toward the center to grab one of the middle cries to secure a better Timonium source, but now that Bruce and John are fighting, I'm going to have to divert my army.

BRUCE: Blue has a big god guy and a thing called a Sun tdol. All I have are little Bedouin guys. And now all I have are little Bedouin guys who are on fire. They still do a pretty good job of knocking the Blue god down—which is great, considering they'd have to make a giant Bedouin pyramid just to look him in the face. Oh, yeah? Well, uh...just wait until my friend Tom gets here! He'll show you! Blue wisely decides to get out of town.

TOM: I arrive after John has pulled back, but I park my army here to create a sort of DMZ.

SRUCE: Oh, crap—it's another glant Aztec-god guy! But he's Green, so it's Tom. Hi, Tom! Thanks for dropping by. Can you just cover me white I grab Luxembourg? What? It's a small European country southeast of Belgium. Whatever Just stand there and keep an eye out. *Merci.*

TOM: John's rebuilt army is moving to capture his closest inner ring city, so Bruce and I descend on it. Well, I descend on it and Bruce hangs back to grab a neutral city before bringing up the rear. I use Xil's Burning Beams to cut through John's Sentinels, but he drops a Star Bolt on me, and then Lee's Vinci fires off an Industrial Devastation. Everyone takes heavy losses, but John can't hold up with two players attacking him.

BRUCE: Our Luxembourg occupation force caught the Blue god and his army. I'm down to a couple of cavalry guys and a lobster Apparently, the lobster is really good against humans. because he happily pinches away at them. Tom still has a million guys, and that's nice for him.

TOM: After driving John back, Bruce and I are killing a bunch of his miners, when Lee comes rolling up with Glacomo and half a dozen squads of musketeers. Bruce only has two wounded units left—a scorpion and a Condottleri dragoon. And I'm waiting on reinforcements from teching up Zeal, which gives me free Sentinels. It's a close battle, but we hold Lee off. If we'd had to fight John and Lee at the same time, it wouldn't have gone so well...but by taking them on in separate engagements, we're able to win both.



MY UNDERSTANDING IS THAT WE'RE AUTO-MATICALLY GOING TO WIN, BECAUSE TOM IS ON OUR SIDE, THIS SHOULD BE EASY.

BRUCE: Lee brought along a hero named Giacomo, inventor of mana. That guy invented mana? He must be a b llionairel Anyway, we blew up Giacomo. I guess he ran QOM.

TOM: Really bad news—here comes Dan's army. It's another Cuoti force led by another XiI (the dude's a giant robot cat, so you can understand his popularity). I have a handful of Sentinels, my XiI is badly wounded, and his powers are recharging. What's more, my decimated army is pinned between this fresh force and John's capital. So I run through Dan's army, taking heavy losses, toward where Bruce has built a Gless Citadel. XiI is pretly much the only survivor and Bruce has only a few units. If Dan pushes, we're in trouble.

BRUCE: A neutral city still sits near the center of the map, which is where I guess John was headed before Tom and I lobstered him. But now that Orange has shown up and bushwhacked us, he isn't kidding around. He takes the city without much troub e.

TOM: Fortunately, Dan contents himself with that neutral city. He grabs it and sits there. Time



to play the Mike card; Mike has been sitting off on our right flank, bordering Dan's territory and quietly building a huge force. I tell him to go ahead and attack Dan, which will hopefully draw off his army. Then Bruce and I jump in to grab the city Dan had just taken, hoping to find it undefended.

No such luck. Not only is his army still parked here, but he's bulkt a Sanctuary, which is the Cuotl fortress. We fight it out with our Xiis: Blinding Armor, Mirror image, Burning Beams, you name it. John drops his Star Bolt on Bruce's army. Dan and I bang Cuotl armies into each other while Bruce bangs on the city. I have to pul XII back again. I don't think we're going to take this city—but the good news is that on our right flank, Mike is merrily rolling over Dan's undefended city.

IRRUCE: Ow! What was that all about? I don't like turning points, but that may have been a big one right there. Tom's forces (and mine) are decimated, and an Orange wave rolls over my Glass Citadel and toward my cities.



Tom and Bruce counterattack against Dan's city. It doesn't go very well.





TOM: Dan doesn't seem to care about losing his city to Mike, as he advances up our left flank, right into Bruce's territory. This time, he's accompanied by Lee's army: Glacomo, a couple of Air Destroyers, and a bunch of Imperial Grenadiers. John even gets a few units into the battle. I lose the forward Fane and Temple I'd built, as well as XII, It's a massacre. They've knocked down Bruce's defenses, and now the whole mass is moving in on his forward city. The only army I have is the Sentinels I'm about to receive for teching up my Zeal. It won't be enough.

BRUCE: Now the Orange Revolution is at the gates, with some Yellow and Blue mixed in, I think Yushchenko himself is storming it. My capital is the next city in line. If I lose my capital, I'm out of the game. But we still have a page to go!

TOM: It's time to call in Mike again. I tell him that Dan's capital is undefended, right in front of him. "Just waiting for one more siege guy," Mike types. One more siege guy? Does the word "undefended" not register?

Thirty seconds later, Mike types "OK" and moves in—with three Glass Cannons instead of just two, Because two never would have done it. Mike "McCleilan" rolls forward white Dan's army storms Bruce's city.

BRUCE: Orange takes my forward city and is moving in toward my capital. I guess the rest of this article will be written by Tom.

TOM: Mike "McClellan" slowly attacks a defensive tower with his Glass Cannons while his anormous army loiters around behind them. They're within spitting distance of Dan's capital, and they're not doing anything!

BRUCE: My cap tal is going down. I start giving Tom my resources to prepare for my impending defeat. I also offer him a few pointers on what to do with the rest of the word count.

TOM: Having knocked over the lone tower, Mike's Grass Cannons finally start firing on Dan's capital. Nearly a full minute later, Mike reduces the city, but still hasn't moved close enough to trigger the capture flag. His army is just sitting there! I tell him to push forward. But since he's taken so long, the army attacking Bruce's city pulls away and heads to the other side of the map to defend Dan's capital.

BRUCE: And then, just as all seems lost, the Orange forces gather, turn around, and head back toward the other side of the map. Saved!

TOM: Dan's army rolls in at Mike, who's finally gotten around to triggering the capture flag on the ruined Orange capital. Mike holds him back, but Lee is close behind. By the time Lee arrives, the capture timer is within pixels of giving Mike the city. At almost I terally the last second, Dan resets the timer and starts taking his capital back. Ouch Mike's army is dead, but at least hers drawn Dan, Lee, and John off.

Then, one second after the 30-minute mark on the timer, the following message appears gloriously across the middle of my screen: "Our City of Vengeance has arrived!" Fifteen seconds later I get a message that John's started building his own City. Time to move

BRUCE: Hey, look at that. They're attacking Tom's capital now.

TOM: Yikes...! d.dn't see that coming Suddenly, Lee's got three Air Destroyers and some Clockwork Men with Giacomo at my capital. They tear it down and start the capture timer, while my City of Vengeance slows floats back to defend it. Along the way, whom should I meet but no less that five (5I) of John's Elite Sun tdols stomping to reinforce Lee! I use the City of Vengeance's Gravity Wave to atun them and give myself a head start. Once I get to my capital, I park the City and let it do its thing. It eventually thins out Lee's forces enough to swing the capture timer back to me, but then John's Sun idols start fromping up. I use Reintegrate to heal my battered City, and I barely dome out ahead (it's left with 15 health out of a total of 2,600), thanks in part to Bruce's flying hero and Sand Dragon.

BRUCE: That's what I get for helping Tom.

Now my capital's getting stormed again, this time by a Blue City of Vengeance. With Tom's capital safe, he sends his forces this way. I also get a brand-new Glass Dragon to add to my flying god and some assorted units. The Blue City of Vengeance doesn't last long.

TOM: While watching the replay, it turns out that John didn't have the energy to heal his City with the Reintegrate power. Hah! Meanwhile, Mike "McCleilan" has been left alone long enough to get out his Glass Dragon. Safe in the knowledge that he has a strong enough army, Mike moves back to Dan's capital and takes it, knocking him out of the game and turning his cities over to John

Now it's time to deal a knockout blow to John before he can build back up. Bruce and I quickly move for the Blue capital, along the way, we pass a city with a pair of Sanctuaries built right next to It. Suspecting an elaborate trap, we ignore it and attack John's capital. While we're capturing it, John types, "You want to know something hillarious? I forgot which city was my capital." Which would explain those two Sanctuary forfresses back there—John accidentally defended the wrong city

bruce: The capital falls, with Yellow left holding the remnants of the Blue empire. We have a huge edge at this point, and it's just a matter of time now. Those attempts to storm our capitals were their last opportunities to turn death into a fighting chance for life.

TOM: I'm not entrely certain, but it sounds a bit like Bruce was actually enjoying himself. He'll probably deny it, but I can briefly Imagine Bruce having a grand of time playing a wacky real-time strategy game, even if he's not hip to some of its nuances. This is one of the best things about playing team games: It takes—and allows—all types.



"YOU WANT TO KNOW SOMETHING HILARIOUS?" I FORGOT WHICH CITY WAS MY CAPITAL."



The Orange wave advances.



▲ Tom's City of Vengeance and Bruce's Glass Dragon chew up the scenery.

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO WHAT WE SAY-AND WHAT THEY SAY--ABOUT: THE LATEST IN PC GAMING



RMORED FURY

We say: "Nothing is bad here, and having planes that are slow enough that the nonelite of Bettlefield 2 can engage them with ground-based weapons is a good change to the core game."

-Patrick Joynt, 1UP.com (7/10)

They say: "While [expensions] and boosters are designed to increase the enjoyment of a gameamong existing fans, the new cooperative mode might just bring a few new players into the fold." IGN (8/10)



We say: "City Life is the freshoat take on the alty-sin genre in memory, managing to be both as challengingly complex as its more gearheaded forebears. and more socessible to casual of more philosophical players. Nice trick."

—Greg Kramer, 1UP.com (\$/10)

They say: "City Life isn't quite up to the caliber of the franchise that inapired thevest majority of its design, but it's still a rewarding and enjoyable city-building sim. GameSpot (7.8/10)



MOVIES: BTUNTS & EFFECTS

We say: "le it worth 30 bucker if you're heavily invested in its moviemaking tech, the answer is probably, though a 10-dolfur shave seems more appropriate since stunt antics add relatively little to the sim game." Matt Peckham, (UR.com (7/10)

They say: "The freedom and the improved prop placement options sione are worth the price. while the props, sets, costumes, and effects merely add to the moviemaking experience."

GameSpy (3.5/5)



IZATIONS AT WAR

We say: "There's little information available on your units, and no effec-tive way to manage them. Battles are swirling meases of crap animation—more blobs than armies."

-Tom Chick, 1UP.com (5/10)

They say: "Unless you're specifically looking for a game where you can get down into the action? and make a difference to the battle in a tradjtional RTS setting, look elsewhere.

(GN (6/10)



RUSH FOR BERLIN

We say: "The All, rolls over on anything Jess than Hard, and getting units into tactically feasible formations can be like herding drunken snells, But for hardcore tactical WWII fans, this is everything [the] Codename: Penzels series did—only better, and with bells on.

-Matt Peckham, 1UP.com (7/10)

They says "If any game is capable of convinoing genre veterens of shivering their way through the Battle of the Bulge one more time, it's this one."

GameSpot (7.8/10)



STACKED WIT DANIEL NEGREANU

We say: "For poker beginners who are too shy to jump into the chiline fray." Stacked is a good way to get acquainted with the game in all its forms, from low-limit cash tables to no-limit multitable tournaments

Demine Linn, 1UP.com (5/10)

They say: "Unless you're not old enough to play competitive poker on an online gambling alte (most of which offer free games as well). it's hard to justify picking this one up."

--- GameSpy (2.5/5)

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Battlefield 2: Armored Fury	June 2006	7/10	7.4/10		8/10
Black & White 2: Battle of the Gods	April 2006	6/10	7.2/10	-	7/10
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	March 2006	6/10	6.9/10	_	6.8/10
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	April 2006	-	7.9/10	3.5/5	7.8/10
City Life	June 2006	B/10	7.8/10	3/5	_
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	April 2005	5/10	7.3/10	3.5/5	8.2/10
The Movies: Stunts & Effects	June 2006	7/10	7.7/10	3.5/5	8/10
Rise & Fail: Civilizations at War	June 2006	5/10	6.6/10	2.6/5	6/10
Rush for Berlin	June 2006	7/10	7.8/10	_	_
Stacked with Danlet Negreanu	May 2006	5/10	7.7/10	2.5/5	4.8/10

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE 1UP NETWORK

For more thorough reviews on the latest PC games, point your web browser to cgw.1UP.com today!



DO IT YOURSELF

THAT DUDE WITH THE GUILD WARS
T-shirt wandering through CompUSA with
the thousand-yard stare? He knows it's his
time—to buy a new computer. As a garner, new
technologies and new hype constantly surround
you. You start thinking you need to drop somewhere between three grand and the GNP of Chile
just so you can play Half-Life 2—and that's about
the time you decide to buy a console instead. But
in that direction lies madness.

Sure, one high-end graphics card costs as much as a new console, but you don't really need to buy the Nvidia 7,900,000 GTX Super Turbo Nitro Deluxe or ATI Radeon KnssKrossFireWillMakeYouJump X30000. Don't believe us? We built and tested a road-ready gaming rig that'll play even demanding games at HD resolutions (1280x1024) and laid out all the pieces so you can build your own. But first

THE DISCLAIMER

We've warned you about this before...and we'll continue to warn ya tili we're blue in the face: Building a new computer from scratch is no simple undertaking. Entire books and websites exist solely to ease your pain. Yes, you can hold your geek head high knowing you created a Frankenbox. The downside is that you're on your own—no helpful tech support if your system bottoms out, and no warranty to prevent sleepless nights. Ali

right—now that that's out of the way, it's time to break out the tools. And your credit card.

MOTHERBOARD: EVGA NFORCE4 SLI (133-K8-NF41)

Last month, we gave you a motherboard breakdown so hardcore, it'd make Staphen Hawking weep. Sparing you that misery again, here's some quick advice: When building any PC, cheap or expensive, use a motherboard that is stable, expandable, and—god willing—affordable

So why choose an St.I (Scalable Link Interface) motherboard? Sure, you're not going to run two graphics cards in your \$700 computer, but it's nice to know you have the option for future expansion. Grabbing another graphics card in six months might be an inexpensive way to get a serious graphical boot in the ass.

Of course, EVGA's board has all the other expansion betts and whistles you want in a modern motherboard: Gigablt Ethernet, SATA II, rounded cables, and so on. There's one weird quirk, though. This board has three PCI Express (PCle) graphics slots. Two are for the eight-lane (x8) SLI configuration, but if you're using one card (as we are in this build), you plug it into the single x16 PCle graphics slot that rests between them. This layout uses up the space usually reserved for an additional PCI or x1 PCle slot. If you don't mind cutting down on expandability, then you won't be sorry with this purchase

THE SHOPPING LIST

COMPONENT!	BRANBII MODEL	PRICE
Motherboard	EVGA nForce4 SLI (133-K8-NF41)	\$79
CPU	Athlon 64 3000+ (Socket 939)	\$110
Memory	1GB Corsair ValueSelect DDR400 (2x512M8)	\$78
Graphics card	EVGA e-GeForce 7600 GT CO	\$179
Soundcard	Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Value	\$42
Hard drive	Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB	\$69
Optical drive	Pioneer DVR-111DBK DVD±RW DL Burner	\$45
Case	Antec Sonata II (with 450W power supply)	\$91

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THE \$700 GAM





YOU DON'T NEED TO SPEND A FORTUNE TO PLAY HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE.

CPU: ATHLON 64 3000+ (SOCKET 939)

When CPU shopping on a shoestring budget, bigger isn't necessarily better, AMD's Ath on 64 3000+ CPU provides solid gaming performance and memory bandwidth—just don't make the mistake of buying the 3000+ Socket 754 CPU If you wanted to upgrade well beyond the 3000+ in the future, you certainly could, but you won't get enough of a performance bump to justify the price You'd be better off spending the money it costs to buy even a 3200+ CPU on a better draphics card or more RAM.

MEMORY: 1GB CORSAIR VALUESELECT DDR400

RAM prices fluctuate more than gasoline prices, but we still found a good deal on a pair of Corsair ValueSelect DDR400 512M8 modules.

In a system this cheap, 1G8 of RAM can be a lifesaver. Many games these days benefit from more than 512M8, especially massively multiplayer online games that frequently load a wide variety of textures in areas crowded with unique players. RAM prices continue dropping, but we're probably still a year away from putting 2G8 into a PC at our target price.

Kingston, Corsair, OCZ, PNY, Crucial ...when it comes to basic DDR400 RAM, it doesn't matter which brand name you buy. So long as it's a brand name. You just need to stay far away from flaky, no-frills junk. The money you save won't make up for all the problems and performance headaches.

GRAPHICS CARD: EVGA E-GEFORCE 7600 GT CO

EVGA's affordable graphics card was a favorite in our recent big honkin' Graphics Card Roundup (sea CGW #264, pg. 106, or visit http://go.extremetech.com/graphics). For about \$178, it gives you enough graphic horsepower to run all the latest games without sacrificing visual quality. You won't be able to tackle high resolutions with antial-asing and anisotropic filtering enabled, but honestly, that's beyond the reach of any \$700 PC. Trust us.

SOUNDCARD: SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

if you're on a really tight budget, you can skip the soundcard entirely and just use your integrated PC audio. We find that's usually a bad idea, though. The signal-to-noise ratio is typically poor, 3D-audio options are limited, and, since all the processing is host-based,



Build a low-budget rig to DIY for

games that use lots of audio channels can slow down a bit.

What you need is a good soundcard. The Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Value buys you the very latest Sound Blaster card—the only game in town that off-loads audio processing from the host CPU—without spending much money. Your games will run faster, and you'li get to use EAX (Environmental Audio Extensions) in games that support it.

HARD DRIVE: SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.7 160GB

The seventh-generation Seagate drives aren't quite as nice as the newest ones, but you can

still find these online for a good price. In our case, we found a reasonably roomy 160G8 SATA drive for only 70 bucks. When you need more room—or if you get your hands on some more money—just add a second drive for additional storage.

OPTICAL DRIVE: PIONEER DVR-111DBK DVD±RW DL BURNER

Pioneer makes great optical drives, and the 111DBK is no slouch. This full dual- and double-layer DVD burner supports both the -R and +R formats, and it can burn speeds up to 40x for CDs, 16x for DVDs, and 8x for DVD-RWs.

The drive casing is a little on the long side—not a problem for the system we're building here, but it might be a tight squeeze in a small form-factor PC. These beauties are easy to find for around \$45 online, and they come with either beige or black bezels depending upon how you want to pimp your rig.

CASE AND POWER SUPPLY: ANTEC SONATA II

Yes, you can find cheaper cases out there, but we just couldn't pass up a deal this good. For \$89, you get a very attractive plano-black case that comes with a beefy 450W power supply—that's enough juice to power this whote rig and maybe a second graphics card when you get more cash. It also runs sifently, with an air duct CPU-cooting system that traps some annoying fan noise.



THIS MACHINE EVEN HAS THE CAJONES TO RUN WINDOWS VISTA AT A DECENT CLIP-WELL. THE BETA. ANYWAY.

PRO TIPS

HOW TO BE A HARDWARE HERO



- when ordering a bare-bones PC from a manufacturer, find out which motherboard lies under the hood. ATX boards are common, and they offer plenty of expandability—but some companies, however, choose to cut corners.
- Buying a prabulit machine often means loads of useless preinstalled. software. Ask if you can buy a clean machine with just the operating system; and drivers.
- You want at least a 450-watt power supply providing Juice to your system.
- Look for quick-release mechanisms and thumbscrew case designs. It makes for quicker and relatively painters hardware installations and troubleshooting.
- Cleanliness is next to godliness. It may be a pain, but try binding all the cables inside your case with tis-wraps, and route them away from fans. Otherwise, a stray wire can easily Jam up your CPU cooling fan.
- Check all of the connections before closing the case. If anything is unseated, the PC won't boot./

PERFORMANCE

The second secon

DUDE, DO I JUST BUY A DELL?

GAMIE BENCHMARKS





THE PENNY-PINCHER

COSTS AS MUCH AS. A Sony PlayStation 3

wiTH SONY'S top-end PlayStation 3 listing for \$600, it seems as though consoles are getting as expensive as

PCs. But can you build a game-worthy computer for the same price as Sony's upcoming console? The answer is yes, as long as you set your sights a little lower than duat-core CPUs and two graphics cards. And no orazy Cell processor or Blu-ray discs for you, cheapo.

GAMES IT CAN PLAY: Want to help the Horde? World of WarCraft plays and looks great on this machine. And so will just about any of the games we tested in our \$700 machine.

THE SHOPPING LIST

UMPONEN	idrane i model	PRICE
CPU	Athlon 64 3000+ (Socket 939)	\$110
Motherboard	EVGA nForce4 SLI (133-K8-NF41)	\$79
Memory	1GB Corsair ValueSelect DDR400 (2x512MB)	\$79
Graphics card	EVGA e-GeForce 7600 GS	\$128
Soundcard	Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Value	\$42
Hard drive	40GB Western Digital WD400JD	\$46
Optical drive	Lite-On CD-RW/DVD-ROM Combo Drive	\$26
Case	Antec Sonata II (with 450W power supply)	\$91
MOTA)		

A SUB-\$600 PC? SURE! SAVE EVEN MORE CASH BY SCAVENG-ING PIECES FROM YOUR CURRENT RIG

Æ POWER-PLAYER PC 🛶

COSTS AS MUCH AS: One-anda half refulbished 1988 Yugo GVX

WHEN SOME FANBOY TELLS YOU that buying a console is at who slice cheapenthan buying a RC just remind the erkethat Incordento gelethe lles advertised next-gen-console experience, you have a bunch of hidden costs. You'll probably need to buy a new HDTV and some sort of home theater system. Hell, you can buy a used carrior less. That's when you realize \$1,700 for a solid gaming system doesn't seem like such a bad deal after all.

GAMES IT CAN PLAY: Just about anything that you can currently throw at it. This machine will also be able to handle big upcoming games like Enemy Territory: Quake Wars. I

THE SHOPPING LIST

COMPONENT	BRAND / MODEL	PRICE
CPU	Athlon 64 X2 4400+	\$465
Motherboard	Asus M2N32-SLI Deluxe	\$239
Memory	2GB Corsair XMS2 Twin2X2048-6400PRO	\$240
Graphics card	PNY Verto GeForce 7900 GTX	\$399
Soundcard	X-Fi XtremeMusic	\$115
Hard drive	Seagate 7200.9 160GB	\$68
Optical drive	Pioneer DVR-111DBK DVD±RW DL Burner	\$45
Case	Antec Sonata II (with 450W power supply)	\$91
TOTAL		\$1,663°

THE HIGHLY UNSCIENTIFIC "GETTING YOUR GAME ON" METER



*Prices calculated at pricewatch.com and are subject to change. Also, keep in mind that the cost of new monitor keyboard, mouse. speakers, and copy of Windows XP are not included, After all, you already have that stuff, right?

HARD NEWS

The bleeding edge of tech



StarForce was causing problems with Vista. Recent drivers "fixed" that.



→ Oblivion runs great—even in some crazy "Flip 3D" window.

UISTA'S BETA BREAKDOWN

THINK YOU GOT IT BAD NOW? YOU TRY juggling IRQ conflicts to play Crusader: No Remorse sometime, Pfhehl Kids today. While Windows XP may be a bloated operating system, gamers have fewer headaches to deal with then they did in the past. Microsoft aims to slash your Tyleno; budget even further with its new OS, Windows Vista, But how?

First, the Windows Game Explorer altempts to break down entry barriers with a simple interface; tike Windows Media Player, it even downloads box art and ratings info for your installed games; in the background, WINSAT (Windows System) Assessment Tool) quietly tweaks your gameplay settings according to hardware needs. And when DirectX 10 finally rolls out with Vista's launch, expect completely new levels of eye candy.

While that all sounds great, we got these promises almost a year ago with the arrival of the first

beta. When Beta 2 finally showed up, we spent a full week throwing everything we could at the new OS. Our initial prognosis: We're happy with where Vista is right now-and where it's going-but there's still a lot of work to be done.

All the major gaming features we mentioned earlier are in basic working order, and considering that we probably won't see Vista on store shelves until early 2007, Microsoft has plenty of time to fill in the gaping potholes. This leaves only a few problems to work out between Microsoft, the gamemakers, and the hardware-driver creators.

We've run into two big problems with Beta-2, the first involving StarForce copy protection. StarForce's reliance on a hidden Ring 0 (highly privileged, in CPU parlance) driver causes a compatibility problem that prevents StarForceprotected games from loading-at least, that's the best explanation we could come up with for

the errors we found. Will this be the final nall in the coffin for the controversial content-protection scheme? (Apparently not Just before we went to press, we found out that the StarForce folks have "fixed" the driver issue. Great.—Ed.)

The second big problem is performance. Though many games run well and often "feel" the same as they do under Windows XP, we experienced a performance drop several times when running games under Vista. The drop varies from game to game, but it seems as though antiatiasing and anisotropic filtering cause the biggest performance hits; we suspect that most of these issues are driver-related. Both Nvidia and ATI have acknowledged that their Vista drivers aren't performance-optimized yet, so if you're running games in Beta 2, watch for new video and audio drivers. In the meantime, do what we did Gram in 2GB of RAM to make things run smoothly /

IN THE VISTA TEST GAUNTLET

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THE BLOGR SCHOLLS IV OBLIVION

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HALF-LIFE 2

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Antec's all new P1808

WITHOUT COMPROMISE



























Q: My question is kinda dumb, but I want to make sure I'm doing this right. I have both enalog and DVI connections on my monitor and graphics card; I have a Sceptre 18-inch fiat. Do I connect both the analog and DVI cables? I prefer DVI, as the picture is better, but some of my games get the "out of frequency" blinking—even though I have the resolution set correctly. How can I correct this issue as well?

Darryl Jackson

A: There are no dumb questions...well, maybe there are—but this is definitely not one of them. You only need to connect either the DVI or the VGA plug, not both—your monitor will only show the input from one of them at a time. So, go ahead and live it up with the higher-quality DVI output.

I'm not sure why your games are giving you an "out of frequency" message on your monitor. It could be that, with both plugs connected, your graphics card thinks you're plugging in two monitors-and when you fire off a game, you're really looking at the "secondary display," which the game doesn't support. Going to a single cable from your graphics card to the monitor would fix that. Another problem may be that your game is set to a resolution (and/or refresh rate) that your monitor doesn't support. Safety tip of the day: Make sure you have the latest drivers for your graphics card-and, when possible, always run games at your monitor's native resolution (In your case, 1 bet it's 1280x1024)

a: The new big game for 2007 already looks like Crysis. As a huge fan of FPS titles, I want to be ready. This is where you guys come in: What do I have to upgrade to get smooth gameplay and beautiful graphics from that cutting-edge game? My system: Athlon 64 3000+ CPU, 1GB RAM, GeForce 7800 GTX OC, 120GB hard drive.

Jude

A: To be honest, we can't really say what Crysis' system requirements will be. The game is still very much a work in progress, and there's still some engine development and optimization left before release. Certainly, since PC hardware keeps getting faster, it'll run best on whatever the fastest stuff is just before release. It seems as though your computer will meet the minimum requirements but, if we had to guess, we'd say you might want a little more RAM. Crysis should support some extranifty features with DirectX 10, but that will require a DX10 graphics card (not on the market until at least the later part of 2006) and Windows Vista (DX10 will only be available as part of Vista). Don't go buying anything now in anticipation of the game, though, PC hardware just gets faster and cheaper with time, so you'll get a lot more bang for your buck if you wait to upgrade until the game is almost out.

Q: When DX10 comes out, am I going to have to upgrade my XFX GeForce 7800GT? Please say no!

Zach Geisel

A: NO! Hey, you did say "please." Actually, Zach, did you and Jude get together to write your questions? The short version is that your games will work, but DX10 requires upgrading. For the full DX10 effect, you'll need

to upgrade both your graphics card (again, DX10 graphics cards won't be out until later in 2006) and your operating system (again, DX10 is Windows Vista only). If you don't upgrade, no problem—you can still play the games in their DX9 mode; they'll work just line. Virtually all PC games through 2007 and into 2008 will have DX9 modes.

Q: I'm going to upgrade soon (maybe by mid-August), and I was wondering whether getting the Opteron 170 or AMD Athlon 64 X2 4400+ would be best for gaming. It's also unlikely that I'll do any overclocking of either of them.

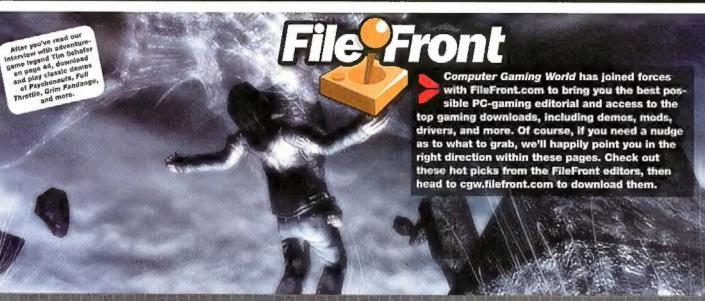
Steven Scott

At Opterons are generally meant for servers and Industrial-class workstations—machines that have particular reliability needs with regard to 24/7 operation, support for ECC RAM, and stuff like that. For a consumer desktop system, you'll always get more performance for your dollar out of the consumer line (Athlon). But, hey, you're not upgrading until August or so, right?

Stay tuned. By that time, you may be able to build a system using intel's upcoming Conroe chip (probably named Core 2 Duo, similar to the notebook Core Duo, but with a "2"). It's a completely new architecture, and the early word is that it'il really give AMD a run for its money in game performance. Of course, if you're just talking about sticking a new CPU into a motherboard you already have, just get the Attlion 64 X2 44004.

Cet weetlenst Send them to Tech_Medics@alldavis.com

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PC DEMOS





alk on callings, travel dely the laws of nature in



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



RUSH FOR BERLIN

out the Third Reich in an

Relive Pixar's latest CG flick, Get behind the wheel of speed racer Lightning McQueen as you sample one of the tracks inspired by the film.

SPACE COMBOY

Download the online game client for this massively multiplayer online space shooter-and, while you're waiting. check out page 28 to find out what it's all about.

BASE INVADERS

Set traps, construct walls, and gleefully hurl your enemies across the screen in this fast and frantic Dungeon Keeperstyle strategy game.



SENSIBLE SOCCER

Catch the bug of the world's most popular sport with this cel-shaded damo, which lets you play n match between England and Argenting.



PENUMBRA

Read all about this physicstechnology-project-turnedhorror-game on page 28, then download the demoand prepare to be scaredby science!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLITION: MYTHS AND LEGENDS WEAPONS V1.1.4 (MOD)

Add seven unique weapons to the realm of Cyrodiil, each with its own unique story line to follow.

Battlefield 2 Mercenaries V8.0 (Mod)

Those Mercenaries modders are at it again with their latest creation. (Please note: This mod only works with) Battlefield 2 v1.3 or later.)

HEROES OF WIGHT AND MAGIC V

Upgrade your game to v1.1, which features autopatching and a new easy mode. This update also squashes a number of bugs that plagued the original release.

CALL OF DUTY 2 V1.3 (PATCH)

This patch fixes various multiplayer game and level issues, raises the game state from 16k to 128k, and addresses an issue with the PunkBuster GUID.

2K GAMES CIVCITY ROME
2K GAMES CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS
2K GAMES DUNGEON SIEGE II: BROKEN WORLD
2K GAMES 2-3
ASS ADS 16-17
ANIEC PIBOB COMPUTER
ASPYR MEDIA. THE QUILD II 108
CCP GAMES EVE ONLINE
CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER X-FI / PREY:
CYBERPOWER SYSTEMS CYBERPOWER 02-63
CYBERPOWER SYSTEMS 73
DELL COMPUTER CORP. XPS
EGAMES INC. MOBCOW TO BERLIN
FULL SAIL REAL WORLD EDUCATION 83
HERO ONLINE HERO ONLINE
IBUYPOWER
IBUYPOWER 56-57
MIDWAY GAMES, INC. RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR
NÈWEGG 30-31
SEGA OF AMERICA TOTAL WAR: ERAS
STARDOCK GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II: DREAD LORDS 6-7
UNIVERSITY OF ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION
VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES CAESAR IV
VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES JOINT TASK FORCE
WIZARDS OF THE COAST DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

GREENSPEAK WE HAVE THE EXTR

AGE OF **RISING** LEGENDS II: THE MANUAL!

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your purchase of Age of Rising Legends II: The Sword of Xanthor! This all-new real-time fantasy strategy game is the sequel to Age of Rising Legends I: The Blade of Xanthor, the award-winning real-time fantasy strategy game that took you where literally no real-time fantasy strategy game had ever taken you before: to the magical kingdom of Xythysyllfyx! It has been 8 million years since Lord Xanthor was felled by Thelia the Elf Queen inside the frozen temple atop Mt. Mung. This event would have cataclysmic repercussions throughout the known-and even unknown-universe. Worst of all, it decided the fate of the tiny-yet-noble people of Vom who, because of Xanthor's death, would live forevermore in a sunless world with bad plumbing and a shortage of decent gelato.

Now, a new danger arises, A magical bolt of blue lightning has struck the tomb of Xanthor, reanimating his corpse and enchanting his blade with the legendary essence of Ulb. Whoever controls the blade controls the universe, and so the race is on amongst the various races of Xythysyllfyx —the warlike Yutz, the magick-wielding Fae, and the mystic she-ninjas of Pune. Rally your troops, build your cities, and fill your inventory slots with luncheon meat, because the search is on...for the Sword of Xanthor!

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

To install Age of Rising Legends II, you will need at least a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, 2GB RAM, and 4G8 hard disk space. To actually play the game, you will need an IBM Blue Gene supercomputer with a minimum speed of at least 280 teraflops. If you experience hang-ups, crashes to the desktop, or fatal system errors, make sure you have the latest drivers, whatever that means. Please visit the websites of all the vendors of the pieces of your PC to see if they can help you, because we have no clue.

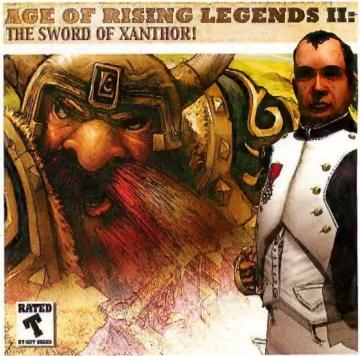
INSTALLATION

To install Age of Rising Legends II, insert the DVD into the DVD drive. The installation should begin automatically. If it doesn't, remove the disc from the drive, blow on it and wipe it with your shirt, and then try again. If this still doesn't work, bang once on your monitor and yell, "C'mon!" If this still doesn't work, return it and buy the Xbox version. CD-ROM users should install Disc 1 first, and then follow the above procedure for Discs 2 through 12. When Disc 10 fails, please restart the installation over from Disc 1, and repeat. Then buy the Xbox version.

Once installed, the game must be activated at our website at swordofxanthor.org (allow up to five days for activation) for an additional \$9.99. After activation, and before playing for the first time, please log in at swordofxanthor.org/login and create your player account (allow up to 10 days to log on to server due to crashes and overcrowding).

CREATING YOUR CHARACTER

In Age of Rising Legends II: The Sword of Xanthor, you have the opportunity to create your own completely unique hero. Are you a blue-haired,



green-eyed Yutz...or perhaps a green-haired, blue-eyed Fae? With up to two hairstyles and eye colors to choose from, the possibilities are literally endless. For those players who would rather "jump right in" without creating their own character, we provide two premade characters that you can use: A blue-haired, green-eyed Yutz and a green-haired, blue-eyed Fae.

STARTING A GAME

Now that you've created your character, you are ready to start the game. Congratulations!

To start a new game, click "New Game" from the main menu. The opening movie fills you in on every single thing that's happened in the 8 million years since the events in Age of Rising Legends I. You cannot skip it, as we spent 80 percent of our budget on it and don't want you to miss it, even though with all that money we still couldn't figure out how to get the characters' mouths to move or the eyes to not have that welrd, glazed-over zombie look.

PLAYING THE GAME

The single-player campaign consists of 15 individual missions, each with its own unique and exciting challenges, such as unbalanced maps, a dearth of adequate resources, unclear mission goals, and an A.I. that cheats, Good luck!

To play, create a bunch of buildings and units, then search on the map for enemy forces and kill them. Each race has several specialized units with unique abilities and spalls, but the best strategy is to click frantically on whatever random units you've created, click on the enemy, and then see what happens.

WINNING THE GAME

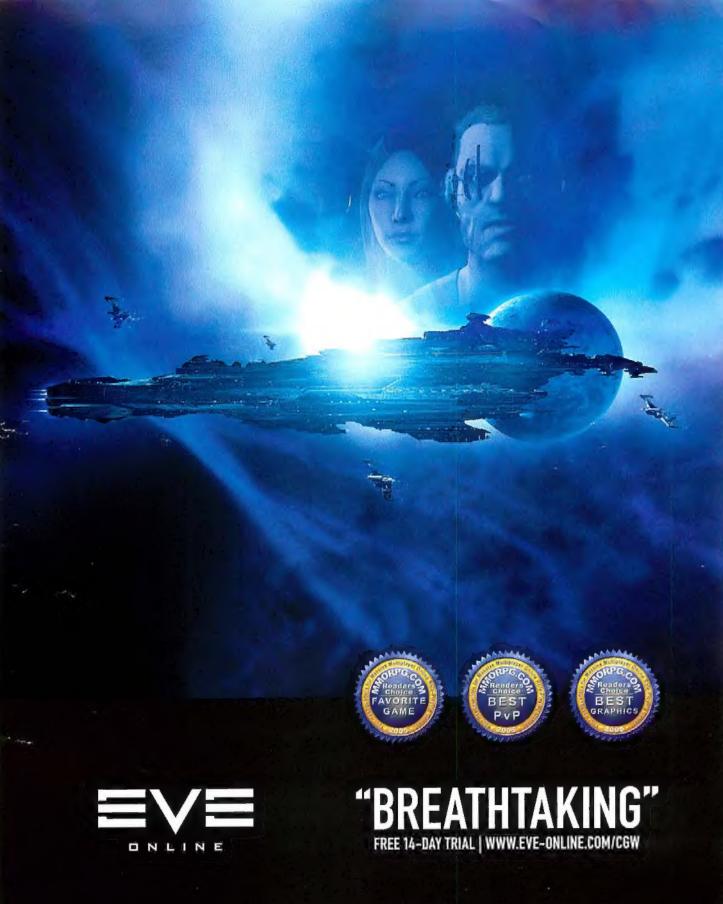
The game ends when you successfully capture the Sword of Xanthor, or when you uninstall the game and resell it for a profit to some unsuspecting loser on eBay.

Good luck, everyone. We'll see you in another 8 million years for Age of Rising Legends III: The Dagger of Xanthor I Jeff Green

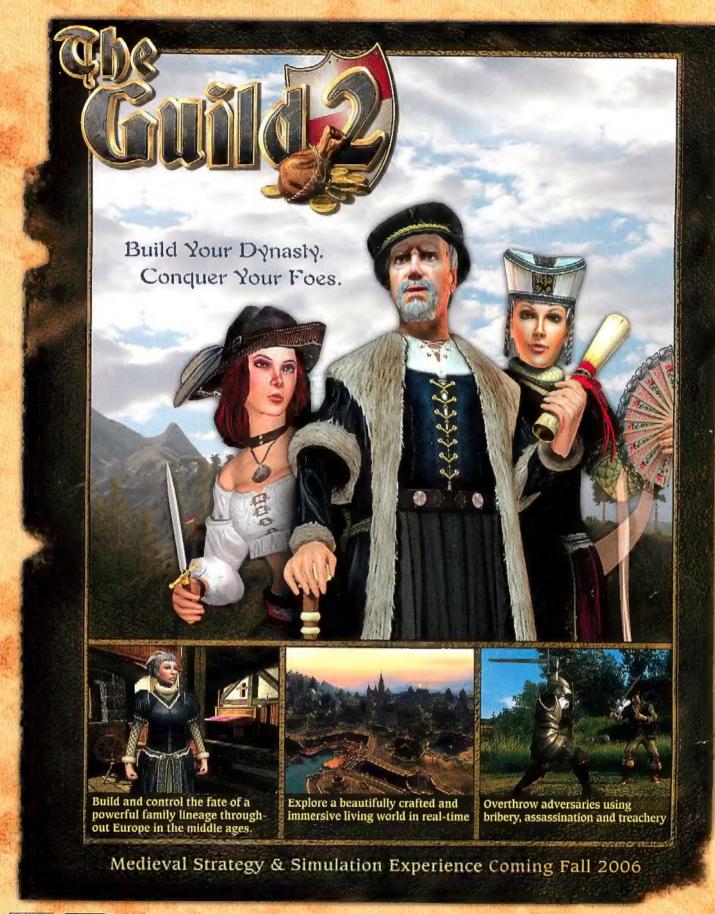


What Jeff doesn't realize is that Sword of Xanthor is actually the third game in the series. Correct this egregious continuity error at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com

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